

BOOKS BY
Mary Roberts Rinehart

THE ROMANTICS
THIS STRANGE ADVENTURE
TWO FLIGHTS UP
LOST ECSTASY
TIME PLAYS THE GAME
HOMAN'S LAMP
THE RED LAMP
TEMPERAMENTAL PEOPLE
THE GUT TRAIL
TWENTY-THREE AND A HALF
HOURS' LEAVE
THE BRAZING POINT
SIGHT UNKNOWN AND THE
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A DOOR THREE MANS

THE TRACK OF GOD
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THE WINDOW AT THE WHITE CAT
THE AMAZING ADVENTURES OF
LETITIA CARRERY
WHERE THERE'S A WILL
THE CASE OF JUNGLE BRICK

With Irvin S. Cobb

ISN'T THAT JUST LIKE A MAN?

and

OH! WELL! YOU KNOW HOW WOMEN ARE!

With Avery Hopwood

THE BAT



THE
ROMANTICS

by

MARY ROBERTS
RINEHART



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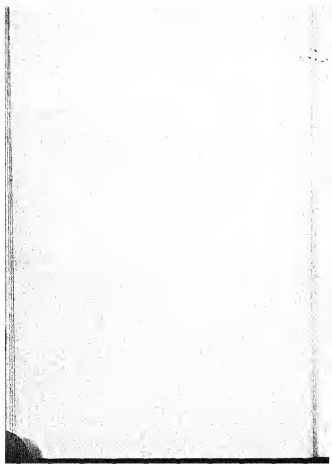
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OF AGE

The Old Man Cleans His Revolver





THE OLD MAN CLEANS HIS REVOLVER

They never spoke of the years. Between them was the fiercely maintained fiction of youth. Eternal youth. Passionate, alluring, virile youth.

When she lagged on her ridiculous heels he would pause, breathless and asthmatic, and they would admire the view.

"Charming, eh, darling?"

"Lovely. The sun on the river—"

She would ease her small feet in her tight slippers, frivolous with buckles, and look for a bench; and seated she would slide her feet out of her pumps, and he would take in long breaths of air. He would look out over the river, so as not to see what she had done, and she never slipped her arm through his until he had ceased that old fight of his for air.

Sometimes people passing stared at them; the little old lady, with her dyed hair, her bangles, her unutterably frivolous hat. Her loose throat was secured by a wide band of black velvet, with a paste buckle in front, and this she wore very tight, so that at night there was the mark of it on her neck, a red rectangle which would not rub away. On

warm days the band made her very hot, and small thin trickles of the black paste she used on her eyebrows and lashes would extend down onto her cheeks.

Then he would say:

"There is a tiny smudge of soot on your cheek, dearest."

She would get out her mirror and wipe off the stain, while he gazed out at the panorama of life which passed them as they sat on their bench. It moved so fast, so incredibly fast. There were days when he felt slightly dizzy from it, although he never told her. He would not wear glasses.

"I *am* dirty," she would say, repairing the damage. "They burn so much soft coal. There ought to be a law."

And as if to support this fiction between them, to bolster up her pride, sometimes she would lean toward him and flick an imaginary soot from his high stiff white collar.

He was very straight, very aquiline, very old. From the rear, as he marched along, he gave a jaunty impression of youth, his flat back, his swinging cane, his neat spats. And before her he never relaxed. His chest was out, his shoulders squared. Crossing streets he had to resist the impulse to offer her his arm. She did not like him to offer her his arm. It was as though she was old and needed help.

Not that she told him that. She said it was quaint; quaint and old-fashioned.

"Nobody does it, dear."

"It is those heels of yours," he would grumble. "They are deadly, and with things moving so fast—"

"You would hate me in anything else. You know you would."

From under the mascara she would glance up at him coquettishly, and he would look around quickly and then kiss her befingered hand. So many rings, one after another; little diamonds, scraps of sapphires — sapphires were her birthstone — baby pearls.

"I love your little feet. I love everything about you."

She would color delicately under her purplish rouge, and for a moment there would be between them, not the illusion of youth, but youth itself. Their hearts would beat a little stronger, his grasp on her hand would tighten. So they would sit.

Little children would pass them, turning limpid eyes on them.

"Look, Annie! Look at the funny people!"

"Hush, for goodness' sake! How often have I told you?"

But for that moment they were armored against intrusion; just the two of them on a park bench,

seeing about them, like young lovers, only a shadowy world of no importance.

On rainy days, or when the wind came fiercely down the river, they did not go out. They sat in their bit of an apartment, their two chairs by the window, their knees touching. And often he read aloud to her, the stilted romances of their youth.

"My dear master, I am Jane Eyre: I have found you out—I have come back to you."

When he read a line like that she would hesitate in her sewing—she would be making herself some dreadful bit of frippery out of scraps from her trunk—and glance at him, but he would read steadily on. He had not noticed, or if he had—

Years ago she herself had gone away from him. A wild impulse, soon regretted. She had gone away with another man. But she had come back again.

He would read on:

"In truth? In the flesh? My living Jane?"

"You touch me, sir—you hold me, and fast enough: I am not cold like a corpse, nor vacant like air, am I?"

Yes, she had come back. It was a long time ago. He had blamed himself as well as her. He had been jealous, and maybe inattentive. He had had to work so hard, but that was so they could lay up something for their old age. But it had been hard for him, very hard. He had been quieter since. It had

done something to his belief in himself. That was why she was so careful now.

"That's such a nice tie, dear. It matches your eyes."

"You're a ridiculous woman. Matches my eyes, indeed!" And he would draw himself up to his full height, and look down at her. "So you like me a little, do you?"

"I adore you."

But sometimes, at night when he was sleeping, she would think of those old mad days, and feel young and oddly light. She had almost forgotten the other man. She could not even recapture his image. He was unimportant now, save for the one thing. He had desired her. He had loved her madly. Her memory discarded those later days when he had ceased to desire her or to love her, and clung tenaciously to the rest.

In the morning she would have forgotten, but she would be happy. She would fetch from the trunk some terrible bit of velvet and a cluster of flowers and make herself a hat, and when it was made they would go out for the daily walk, the flowers bobbing, people staring, and a little song in her heart.

She did not know that what she had gained was reassurance, the belief that she could still hold her own man. For that too was a part of the fiction

between them, built so carefully that now they believed it; that each was still attractive to the other sex, that the men who stared at her curiously needed but a look to follow her, that the young women who eyed him as a relic of some queer past were predatory creatures, bent on luring him from her.

"That's rather a pretty girl, darling," he would say.

"She's a trifle fat, don't you think?"

Or:

"That's an interesting man."

"He's not a gentleman."

"Why?"

"I don't like the way he looked at you."

She would be secretly delighted, and at the next turning of the path she would glance back. Casually; oh, very casually, but she never fooled him. He would walk on, swinging his stick almost violently. Once she was quite certain that the person who was not a gentleman had halted and was gazing after them.

Perhaps it was because they were so entirely alone. There had never been any children, and they had no money for friends. There were even no relatives. Here and there over the country were graves they had never seen, and in these graves lay their past. The present, a bit of the future, and each other,—that was all they had. And they were

always together; even in the apartment hardly more than an arm's length away. When his joints stiffened it was as though the liniment was on her, and when her head ached he too inhaled the menthol. If she fancied minced chicken he ate it, although he loathed it, and when he craved a boiled dinner she ordered it from the restaurant below, and ungrudgingly shared it.

All their possessions they shared save their clothes; indeed, each had but one possession. She had her vanity box, and he had his revolver. On Saturday nights he wound the clock, and on Sunday mornings he cleaned his revolver.

She fixed the card table before him, and he took the revolver apart and worked with it. Because she was afraid of fire-arms she would retreat into the bedroom, and later on she would open the door a crack.

"Have you finished?"

"All finished. Come in."

He would hold the box—it was in a velvet lined mahogany box—in his hands, and like those occasional memories of hers at night, the holding of the box gave him renewed confidence in himself. He felt masculine and strong and dangerous. It was as though he said:

"See, I am still a man. There is death in my hands. Beware of me. Be careful."

Not until it was on the shelf above the books did she seem to relax again.

But she was not really afraid of fire-arms. She only pretended to be.

One winter he developed a bad knee. She put cloths soaked in arnica on it, but there it was, swollen and painful, and he could not get about. She never left him, except once in two weeks to get her hair retouched. It was dyed so very black that it had to be watched carefully.

Not that they admitted to each other the purport of these absences of hers.

"I'll have to go downtown today for an hour or two, dear."

"All right, honey."

"I have some errands."

"Then you'd better have some money."

On the retouching days he would give her five dollars or so, but every three months or maybe less he would give her twenty. When she came back he would not refer to any change in her, but he would tell her she was beautiful.

"Beautiful, and the light of my soul."

She would be filled with love and thankfulness, that he was hers again, that he was still faithful, that she was still holding him. For the next few days, if she grew warm, there would be a heavy

odor of dye over the rooms, but she was so accustomed to it that she did not notice it.

So now and then she left him, and because he liked to read to her, he did not read when she was gone. He sat and watched the clock or looked out of the window, where the children and the nursemaids walked in the park, and made him feel—when she was away from him—so very, very old. He had no particular memories to fall back on save tragic ones, best forgotten, and he refused to look ahead. Not in the daylight anyhow. Now and then in the night, when the pain kept him awake, the future came like a demon, and sat on the foot of the bed and told him dreadful things.

"It has to come. One or the other of you."

"I decline to think about it."

"You do think about it. Don't lie. Which first? It will be easier for the one who goes first."

"Then let her be the one."

But that was dreadful. She lying there, cut off. Her breath stopping, her little beringed hands folded across her breast; she who loved life, who held to it so tenaciously.

"No! Take *me* first."

And then he saw her alone, old and alone. Nobody to admire her pretty things, her pretty gestures, her little bird-like mincings and affectations. Nobody to help her across the streets, or sit on the

bench with her, or read to her on rainy days. Not that! Oh God, not that!

This, however, was only at night and not often. He was contented enough in the daytime to be sure of her, to wait for her, to watch for her with the odd illusion of girlishness which distance lent her, walking home to him through the park. He had no far glasses, only the ones he read with; but he always knew her.

It was while watching her so one day that a terrible thought came to him. Suppose he went first? Would she marry again? He saw no absurdity in this. She was so little and so soft, so feminine. And she liked admiration. He had seen her preening herself. Also she would be lonely. She had hardly ever been alone, not for years and years. Not since he had found her, abandoned by that scoundrel, sitting by herself and staring at a packet of veronal powders. He had brought her back, and she had never been alone since.

He gave her a queer look that day when she came in. She was warm from the walk, and a small black island had formed beneath each eye; also the familiar aura of dye filled the room.

"And what have you been doing all this time?" she inquired. "Getting into mischief?"

Her tone implied that there was no mischief beyond him, but he did not smile.

"I have been thinking," he said. "You have no life of your own. No life without me."

"Why should I want anything else?"

"If you were left alone——"

She put her hand over his mouth. "Don't be silly," she said. "You've been left too long. You're morbid."

After that, however, he made her leave him each day. It was as though in his jealousy of the future he was teaching her to be alone, to be contented to be alone. When she protested it frightened him. She must learn. Day after day he sent her out to walk, pretending she needed exercise. She did not walk. She sat on a bench—alone now—and because it was cold she could not slip off her high-heeled shoes.

He could not see her there, save as a dot of vivid purple, or blue, or green. He would watch this, and rub his old hands together. She was learning now, learning to be alone. Not that she liked it. She protested daily.

"It's foolish. I can put a blanket over your knees and open the window. Why should I go out?"

And her protests pleased him, while he remained insistent.

"I get tired of you, woman!" he would say. "Hasn't a man a right to be alone now and then? Get out with you!"

She would pretend to be angry, and he would drag her down and kiss her, and for a moment—no more—the illusion of youth filled the room, and the demon covered his face.

One day something unusual about the bench caught his eye. She was a purple dot that day, and beside the purple was another dot, black. She was not alone. At first he thought it was some casual passer-by, but later he was not so sure. The black dot remained, and it seemed to him—but this was probably imagination—that the purple was excited; that it was moving its hands, tilting its head.

He was uneasy. He watched jealously, and after a long time the black dot got up and moved away. When she came in she said nothing about it, but she was still excited. You could not fool him about her. She was excited. She hurried in and went to the mirror, and stood there turning her head this way and that.

"Was it pleasant in the park, honey?"

It was a moment before she answered him. It was as though she had had to summon her thoughts from a far distance.

"Wonderful," she said. "The air was glorious, and all the pretty nursemaids, with the children——"

Something had happened to her. She was not jealous of the pretty nursemaids any more, and she had not mentioned that black dot. His hands clenched, he gazed with fury at the swollen knee which left her alone at the mercy of the world.

She was vague all that day, and secretly exultant. When he wanted ham and cabbage she ordered a salad, and so there were two orders to pay for. In the afternoon he heard her digging in the trunk, and when she came back she had a scrap of red velvet in her hands, and a bunch of satin cherries. Later on he saw her with her red earrings in her hands, comparing them. She had not worn those earrings for years; she had been wearing them when she went away from him, so long ago.

That was a Saturday. That night he wound the clock, and the next morning he cleaned his revolver. He held it for quite a while before he put it back in the box, and she put in her head and said:

"How long you are!"

Then he put it away and she came in.

All that next week she was very gay. She bought a new bottle of scent, and she perfumed her ears just before she started out. Sometimes she loitered, looking at the clock; he would pretend not to notice. And once she was a trifle late, and he watched her hurrying across on her absurd heels to where that black dot already occupied the bench.

His knee grew worse day by day, and in the afternoons he would have fever. Then he would look out at the black dot, and it would swell into sizable proportions and become the other man, still young and debonair and cruel. Then she would come back, and the fever would go down.

But she was detached. Sometimes he had to speak to her twice. Loneliness began to grip him about the heart like a strong hand; even when she was in the room, and at night the demon on the foot of the bed made faces at him and laughed.

"Now which?"

"Take me."

And the demon laughed and laughed, until she leaned over and shook him.

"Are you sick?"

"No. Why?"

"You were laughing in your sleep."

In the soft night light, with her black hair loose about her, she looked almost young again, young and passionate and beautiful. He groaned.

She did not notice how ill he looked that week, and he did not tell her about the fever. She was busy making herself a gray hat with a pink rose on it, and a gray band for her neck. He even continued to read to her, and one day he finished *Jane Eyre*:

"My Master has forewarned me. Daily he an-

nonces more distinctly, 'Surely I come quickly!' and knows I more eagerly respond, 'Amen; even so come, Lord Jesus.'"

His voice broke, he sat staring at the page. She did not notice, however. She was dressing to go out, and a heavy despair settled on him. He saw that he had lost her again, that the undying coquette in her had triumphed once more.

"How do I look? Am I all right?"

He summoned his old heartiness.

"You look lovely to me. You always do."

On Sunday morning she put on the new hat, and a new pair of slippers, very tight. He saw that they hurt her, but he said nothing. He had grown rather silent. She had brought the revolver before she left, and opened the card table, but he did not fall to work. He watched her instead, going to her assignation at the bench. How young she looked, with her gay hat, and her high heels and her little body! How—undying! What was it the other man had written, after she had come back?

"You will always be young to me, young and lovely. I have been a brute and a beast, but something in me will always love you."

She had been a little queer with him after that, for some time.

He did not clean the revolver that morning. His

hands shook too much. And he was very feverish. When he closed his eyes there would be, not one demon but many. At first they were very small, but when he looked at them they grew and grew until they were enormous. Their faces changed too; one feature would melt into another, and there would be glimpses of countenances he had long forgotten. It was as though his whole past crowded the little room, hung from the chandelier and sat on the bookshelf, and as though it mocked him for his age and feebleness; he who had once been a man.

"A man!" it said. "You a man? A shell, a simulacrum!"

The demons shouted, and it was as though all the tragedy of all the old men in the world was crowded into the small room. It echoed with their futile cries, their feeble furies. He covered his ears. He refused to join them. He was still a man; there was death in his hands. Futile? Feeble? Nonsense. He could kill.

He got up slowly, his knee being very stiff, and braced himself against the open window. The gray and black dots were very close together. Ah, they were standing now. That was better. Don't think. Don't stop to think. Act. Be a man. Steady now. Steady, for God's sake. On the black. One on the black. That was roulette. The black dot used to

play roulette; he would leave her to play roulette.

He stiffened, aimed and fired, and with the racket the demons rushed out of the room and left everything quiet. Quiet and peaceful. Outside, too. The two dots had separated, and were going each his own way. He looked down at the revolver and smiled faintly. Then he straightened himself. It was as though that futile shot had restored his manhood. He felt strong again, able to cope with her, to defeat her.

"I won't have you meeting that fellow. Do you hear?"

Let her cry.

It was some time before he saw the bullet hole in the window frame. An hour before that would have daunted him, but not now. He would conquer that hole. What was a bullet hole to him? There was a crafty look about him as he hobbled about, a bit of whimsy. He would outwit her, sharp-eyed little soft thing that she was. A bit of soap to fill it, then a touch of red to match the wood.

He found some red salve in her vanity box and finished the job. But when he had put the salve back he stood looking down into the box. He saw it now for what it was. It was her armory, her secret protection against fear. With this she fought her demons; of age, of future loneliness, of death.

When he had closed the lid he bent down and kissed it. Let her have a friend, let her sit on a park bench and thrust out her tiny feet to be seen and admired. Let life be bearable, and sweet and kind, to her.

When she came back he was cleaning his revolver, and she pouted at him.

"What? Not done with that old thing yet?"

He smiled up at her. Behind her gaiety he saw a little sadness, and there were black lines on her cheeks, as though she had hurried back to him in the spring heat.

"Was it pleasant outside?"

"Very. And—oh yes, I must tell you. I was talking with such a nice man. He came and sat down beside me. Rather young and very distinguished. He writes books. He said he would put *me* in a book! Ridiculous, isn't it?"

"Not at all ridiculous, darling," he said gravely. "Who better deserves it? But—on a half hour's acquaintance?"

She did not answer that. She said nothing of the past week. Perhaps she was afraid of hurting him. Or perhaps she herself knew vaguely that she had been absurd.

"He's going away," she said, her voice slightly flattened. "He goes tonight. He lives away from here." She went to the mirror, glanced at herself.

"Good heavens, why didn't you tell me my face is dirty?"

"It's the soft coal, honey."

Above the purple rouge, below the dyed hair, her eyes met his, and with a little cry she went toward him and dropped down on her knees.

"Whatever would I do without you?" she said hysterically. "I can't bear to think of it. I can't."

His thin old hand caressed her hair, and to his sensitive nostrils was wafted that peculiar aura of perfume and dye which now he saw served her as his revolver had served him, as strength against the encroaching weakness of the spirit.

"My darling," he said. "My beautiful darling!"

Suddenly he felt very tired. His eyes under their beetling brows made an effort, looked up at the hole in the window frame, so neatly repaired. Then they closed, and he smiled. "I am so jealous of you," he murmured. "So jealous! I must be very young. You—you will always be young."

And he felt her move closer to him. He was her reassurance and her strength. She needed him. She would always need him, and he would never fail her. Never, please God.

He slept, and for a long time she knelt there, afraid to move away. Then she rose and, going into the bedroom, proceeded to make up her reddened eyes again.



OF MIDDLE AGE

The Second Honeymoon

The Papered Door



THE SECOND HONEYMOON

Secretly Harriet had always been afraid of losing James. Even the girls, Charlotte and Clara, did not know it, but her life was a continual battle to hold him. It was for James that she did her hair and had her face massaged, and that at night—James disliked her to use cold cream—after he was asleep, she would slip into their bathroom and smack what the woman at the shop called her contour with astringent, paying particular attention to the two small, very small, breaks on either side of her chin. After that she would grease her face thoroughly, and as by morning most of it was on the pillow, James never suspected.

It was for James too that she made or bought her fine white undergarments. Harriet still wore them, although the girls wore wisps of chiffon and hardly that. She came of a period which believed that hand-made things had a peculiar and deadly appeal to the male.

"Look, James, every stitch hand-made!"

"Humph," James would say. "Very nice." Not even James's best friend could say that he was demonstrative.

But James was sound. His life was an open book, with the pages all precisely alike. Every day except Sunday he went to the office. On Wednesday and Saturday afternoons he played golf, and every evening unless they dined out, which was rare, he and Harriet played chess.

Harriet loathed chess. She never won; she was merely James's sparring partner, so to speak. The back of her neck would ache, and James would sit for what seemed like hours, pondering his next move. But at least he was there. He was not out somewhere, subject to the temptations which assailed other and weaker men.

"One thing you can say about James," said Charlotte, disrespectfully, "you always know where he is!"

Charlotte had even referred to him, once or twice, as Faithful James. Harriet did not understand this new generation, and she worried about Charlotte. Coming out, she thought, had changed her. And as for the clothes she wore! Often Harriet was glad that Charlotte came down with her evening wrap on, for James considered most of the clothes he saw disgraceful, and some women exhibitionists.

But it was Charlotte that winter who first noticed that Harriet was looking worn, and took James aside.

"She's tired," she said, "and nervous, father. She's jumpy."

"Tired?" said James. "Why? She hasn't much to do."

Charlotte eyed him. She was fond of James, but she considered him rather stuffy.

"No," she said. "Maybe that's the trouble. If she'd go away somewhere, and forget she's a wife and mother, and maybe flirt a bit——"

"Do you need to be disrespectful to your mother?" James demanded stiffly.

But Charlotte was undaunted.

"There you go!" she said. "Your mother! You call her mother all the time, father. She's got a perfectly good name but you call her mother. It ages a woman. You're aging her, James."

That outraged him. He was a dignified man, was James. A neat, systematic orderly man. Punctual, too. In the seven years Miss Sanders had been his secretary he had never been late. As to other matters, Miss Sanders had been with him six and a half years before she got a cinder in one of her eyes, and he was forced to discover that they were a sort of faded blue.

To be honest, however, it was considerably more than six and a half years since he had noticed Harriet's eyes, or perhaps Harriet herself to any considerable extent. She was there beside him, like

his right hand, and naturally the suggestion that she go away and flirt a bit was rather like suggesting that his hand pick a pocket.

He was angry as he drove downtown to the office. James! Calling him James! This young generation, what sort of fathers and mothers would they make? They had no respect for age or the decencies. True, Clara was coming along all right, now that she was married and had a baby. She called it the brat, but even James felt that this was an affectation. His mind drifted back to Harriet. She had worried about Clara. Maybe that was what was the matter with her. She was worried ever since the day Clara had wandered in and inquired casually how they would like to be ancestors. No reticences, no anything. Just like that, and James's maiden sister there at the time.

But Harriet had been queer when it was all over. James had found her sitting in front of her toilet table gazing at herself, and she had given him an odd look.

"I'm a grandmother, James."

Anybody but James would have replied that he was also a grandfather. But James did not.

"What are they going to call it?"

He had hoped it would be James, but as it happened it was a girl.

"I don't know," she had said absently, and then

unexpectedly she had burst into tears. Reaction, James told her, and patted her kindly on the shoulder.

Up to that time Harriet had taken no interest in James's office. James kept his family and his business strictly separated. But shortly after that she began to ask questions about the office. This surprised him, but he answered her as well as he could, and of course, due to the cinder, he was able to say that Miss Sanders' eyes were blue. Harriet's own eyes were brown, a soft and faithful brown.

Save for this new interest in Miss Sanders—the girl was dull as ditchwater, and why Harriet should ask her to dinner was beyond him—so far as James could see Harriet was all right. True, bringing out Charlotte had been a strain. James himself could plead a case and not go to balls, or the office and so leave early, but Harriet had had to stay up until all hours. James did not believe in letting Charlotte get home as best she could. He knew boys, driving their machines like young lunatics, and as often as not a flask in the car pocket.

James himself was dry. He had gone dry some years ago. He had very firm opinions on lawyers who did not obey the law. But his doctors let him have a glass of claret now and then.

Charlotte's crisp sentences, however, remained

with him that day. They were like a hook with a barb, as perhaps they were meant to be. Without the barb he would have forgotten them at once. As it was, Miss Sanders sat for some time with her book on her knee and her faded blue eyes fixed on him expectantly, but James was thinking. For perhaps the first time in twenty years he was really thinking of Harriet. And now that he was, so to speak, aware of Harriet, he knew that Charlotte was right. Harriet *was* nervous. She had even been pettish at times lately.

"How old do you suppose Miss Sanders is, James?"

"I don't know. Twenty-five, maybe. Why?"

"Twenty-five! She'll never see thirty again." And she had risen suddenly and gone upstairs; it was very unlike her.

He frowned, and Miss Sanders looked frightened. They had not removed her adenoids early enough when she was a child, or something, and when she was frightened she sneezed. She sneezed now, and James got out his handkerchief and held it to his nose.

"Taking cold?"

"Everybody id the office has colds."

James was very liable to colds. Sometimes they settled in his back and he had lumbago. So now he looked at Miss Sanders with considerable dis-

taste, and reached for the telephone. It was as though Miss Sanders' sneeze had crystallized his thoughts for him.

"Can you be ready to go South next Monday, Harriet?"

"I suppose so," she said listlessly. "Where? To Pinchurst?"

Harriet did not play golf, but that had not entered into their previous vacations. James did, as has been said. He played Wednesdays and Saturdays with three other middle-aged and taciturn gentlemen, and if he won anything, a dollar a hole, he put it on the collection plate on Sundays. Charlotte once asked him if he took it out when he lost, but Harriet had laughed to show that Charlotte was trying to be funny, and no harm was done.

"I haven't decided," said James, and rung off. There were no small amenities in James's human relations, up to this time at least. But Harriet did not mind. It was, she felt, a part of that strength of character which was her only protection against a world which was lying in wait to steal James from her. So it came about that when James finally decided to take Harriet away for a change he selected Florida, where she could sit on a veranda and rest. That portion of Harriet which had sat in ballroom chairs on the side lines all winter, or in the library

playing chess, was to be transferred to a wicker chair on a hotel porch.

"What will you do?" asked Charlotte.

"I can rest," said Harriet.

Charlotte eyed James coldly, but he was eating his chicken. He was not allowed red meat.

"Second honeymoon stuff, eh?" she said. "Well—maybe I'd better go too. Not that I belong in a honeymoon, but you could account for me somehow. You call me E. M. Em for short."

"E. M.?" said Harriet.

"Early mistake."

"Good God, Charlotte!" James exploded. "Have you no respect for your mother?"

But Harriet was laughing. She had to laugh to show James that Charlotte was only trying to be funny.

She made her preparations happily enough. Somehow she felt that if she and James got off together by themselves some of her queer nervousness would leave her. For example, that feeling that they were drifting apart. Apart or too close together, she hardly knew which. It was like not seeing the woods for the trees. Their marriage was all cluttered up with—well, with their marriage. Their children and their house and their bank account and their food and their bedroom. They were too close to see each other. And she desperately

wanted James to see her. There were a good many times when she felt that he did not, and from that to seeing some other woman—! Harriet's world those days was filled with predatory women, all looking at James.

And although James was no Adonis, he was a correct and personable individual, and when he was dressed no one would know of that slight protuberance of the abdomen above and below his belt which Charlotte disrespectfully called his tum-tum. She knew it was absurd. For twenty odd years his life had been an open book. Except possibly for Miss Sanders; she felt certain Miss Sanders had a secret passion for James.

In a sense then, which would have astounded James, Harriet's preparations for Florida were designed to bring back a James who had never wandered. She was going out to do battle for James. To this end she bought her clothes, had her face rubbed and iced and smacked, and sat for four mortal hours having a permanent wave. The result was distinctly fuzzy, but as James did not notice she had had it, it did not matter.

It was Clara who suggested that she buy a rose-colored dress like the one she had worn when James proposed to her. Charlotte giggled, but Clara was insistent.

She leaned back. She was very tired. In her mind she ran over James's outfit. Had she packed his shaving cream? And what about his medicine? She had told Charlotte to get it from the bathroom, but had she? If anything was missing James would be—well, James would be upset. Her thoughts ran on. She had been silly about Miss Sanders. Now they were off, just the two of them, shut in together. He was hers; nobody could take him. Something tight that had been around her heart ever since Clara's baby came relaxed. Her hands relaxed. Harriet slept.

When she awakened James was gone. An hour, two hours, went by. The dining car steward announced dinner, and still no James. Harriet straightened her hat and rose stiffly. If he was smoking all this time it was bad for him. He wouldn't sleep, and when he didn't sleep he was upset all the next day. But he was not in the smoking compartment. It was after seven when she found him, on the observation platform, and he was not alone. There was a woman beside him, in a purple hat, and James was saying sonorously:

"I have always felt that the attitude of Mr. Hughes toward the World Court is the only logical one."

He looked faintly annoyed when Harriet prodded

him on the back and suggested dinner. His face was rather sooty, but there was a jauntiness about the set of his cap that was new. Distinctly new.

"Dinner?" he said, and glanced at his watch. "Well, I suppose so. Harriet, this is Mrs. ——" He glanced at the purple hatted one, "Mrs. ——"

"Mrs. Lovett," said the purple hat. "Your husband has been *so* interesting. You *will* be able to tell me some more, won't you?" This to James, who unmistakably bridled.

"Any time you say," he said gallantly. "So few women care about those things, yet they are the life blood of the nation."

"So Mr. Lovett always said," Mrs. Lovett managed to sigh and look coy at the same time, and Harriet gazed at her with cold distaste. If the creature considered that purple hat as mourning, even in the last stages, she—Harriet—did not. And with the cool brutality of wives at such moments, she said to James:

"Your face is dirty."

Mrs. Lovett looked up at James, smiling.

"Just a tiny smudge on your nose," she said. "I've been so thrilled that I hadn't even noticed."

Harriet waited in the diner while James washed up. He was gone for some time, and the dreadful Lovett woman came in and took a table just across.

Harriet looked at the menu and out of the window, but not at her, and when James came back he had changed his tie. He had put on his very best one, six dollars and a half; the one she had bought him for some possible gala occasion. Well, if he considered dinner in a stuffy diner a gala occasion—!

And he had no sooner sat down than the Lovett woman bent toward him.

"I can recommend the roast beef," she said.

Harriet looked at her.

"Mr. Emory is not allowed red meats."

"Oh! I'm sorry."

"Don't be silly, Harriet," said James testily. "I'll have some roast beef," he told the waiter. "Rare."

Harriet's mouth felt dry. She could hardly swallow her food. And Mrs. Lovett made no more overtures. She had lapsed into silence, and her very silence was accusatory. It was as though she said to James:

"I see. I am so sorry for you. You have no life of your own, have you?"

And as though James were saying:

"I can't talk to you while she is here, but there is all day tomorrow. I'll see you tomorrow."

And the car wheels said, "Tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow."

Harriet did not sleep much that night, but James had a fine night. She could hear him snoring in

the upper berth, like a man with an easy conscience, or no conscience at all. She would like to tell Mrs. Lovett that he snored. There were a number of things she would like to tell Mrs. Lovett; that he had a bridge with four teeth on it, and that ever since a long ago operation for appendicitis he had worn an elastic girdle. "To support a weakened muscle," he maintained, but the girls called it his corset.

In her terror she felt that she hated James.

She fell asleep at last, and awakened late to hear James in the lavatory whistling while he shaved. She could hardly believe her ears, for James was a dour man in the morning. Then she remembered, and her heart sank. When he emerged, dressed, she saw that he wore the gala tie again.

Only one thing supported her through the day that followed. It was that the day would end, and on the next Mrs. Lovett would be on her way to Miami. She sat by, therefore, with a measure of philosophy; listened on the platform to James orating about the World Court, and even forcing a smile when, later on, James brought the lady into the drawing room to teach her the rudiments of chess.

"But it is so complicated!" Mrs. Lovett said, "and I have no brains. Everybody knows I have no brains."

"No brains," said the car wheels. "No brains, no brains, no brains."

"Of course you have brains," said James, almost testily.

When they went out on the platform Harriet doggedly went with them. She got cinders in her eyes and even in her teeth, but she remained like a skeleton at the feast, stubborn, fixed. At four o'clock she began to relax, six hours more. Only six hours more. James was on Congress now, and Mrs. Lovett was looking as though all her life she had been waiting for this authoritative view of Congress; she kept her lips slightly parted and her attitude was one of intense concentration coupled with admiration.

"But maybe this bores you?"

"Bores me! It's the greatest compliment I have ever received. That you should take the trouble—"

Harriet's nails made small indentations in her palms. It was not that James was interested in this woman. She knew James. He was interested only in himself. She was a new audience, that was all. But did the woman know that, or did she think she was stealing James?

"It's time for your medicine, James."

He did not even hear her, and at last she got a cinder well imbedded in her eye, and was forced

to retire, routed. James did not seem to notice that she had gone.

It was when he came in to clean up for dinner that he threw the bombshell.

"I have been telling Mrs. Lovett about the West coast, mother," he said blandly. "She thinks she would like it. She says she really doesn't care about Miami."

Harriet felt a shiver go down her spine, and her lips stiffen.

"But she's got her ticket there, James."

"That's easily fixed. I've seen the conductor. You see, she's alone. Rather pathetic, too. She's only lost Lovett about a year."

He got a fresh collar and another tie—the one with gray and red stripes, meant for his golf suit—and Harriet could hear him whistling again as he changed.

She did not go in to dinner that night. She had tea and toast in the drawing room, and went to bed soon after. When James came in to see how she was she was lying in the dark.

"I'm sorry, mother," he said. "Maybe if I get you some aspirin—"

"I've had aspirin," she said shortly, "and for heaven's sake don't call me mother. My name's Harriet."

He was absolutely astounded, so virtuous he felt,

so kindly toward all the world. And at that instant the car lurched and he banged his head against the upper berth. To his indignation was added injury, but he managed to control himself.

"Maybe if you get a good sleep you'll feel better."

"I feel all right," she said coldly. "If you're going on the observation platform you'd better take your overcoat."

He took it! He took it and went, puzzled and affronted. The girls were right. Harriet certainly needed a change. She was nervous. But she'd be better after she'd had a night's sleep. On the rear part of the platform later on with Mrs. Lovett he dilated on the protective tariff at considerable length, while Harriet lay in her berth and stared out at a sensuous southern moon.

The conductor had fixed the ticket matter . . .

At the end of five days at the hotel Harriet locked herself in her room and sat down to consider matters. James and Mrs. Lovett were playing golf. She had gathered from James that she played very bad golf, and she had also gathered—but not from James—that this gave him a very agreeable sense of being male and virile and superior. To prevent talk Harriet had watched them start off once or twice, and she saw this. Also she saw that what Mrs. Lovett wore under her very brief golf clothes amounted to little or nothing.

"She's a hussy," thought this new and embittered Harriet. "She doesn't care for James. All she wants is a man to take her around, but the big fool doesn't see that."

Never before, even in her thoughts, had she called James a fool.

She saw other things, too. She saw very clearly that she was no match for Mrs. Lovett, who had attached herself to James like a barnacle to a rock. Also her mirror told her that she was looking rather worse than when they started. For one thing, Harriet had now to go down to breakfast. For years her breakfast tray had been her one self-indulgence. Self-protection, too, for as has been said, James was dour in the mornings. But ever since Mrs. Lovett had moved to their table Harriet had heroically descended, and James had *not* been dour.

"I *do* hope you don't mind," said Mrs. Lovett pathetically the first morning. "I can't seem to get used to eating by myself."

"Not at all," James had said, in his heartiest manner, and proceeded to eat a substantial meal. Harriet could not eat at all.

She was obsessed with Mrs. Lovett. She, so to speak, ate, drank and slept Mrs. Lovett. She even dreamed Mrs. Lovett. And yet, watch as she might, she could see no real change in James. He did not behave like a man in love. His snoring betokened

unbroken sleep, his appetite was fine. True, he was more fastidious than usual about his dressing, and when Mrs. Lovett said with charming frankness that she disliked the red and gray tie, he gave it to the head bellboy. But this was all that Harriet's jealous scrutiny could discover.

In the morning they golfed, in the afternoons they fished. Mrs. Lovett, who was afraid of the water, wore her bathing suit when fishing in case of an upset.

"You don't mind, do you?" she said to James the first day out. "After all, the human body—and I feel safer."

"Very sensible," said James, the same James who considered modern dress disgraceful. "Recent experiments in the ultra-violet ray have shown the therapeutic value of the sun."

Harriet stared at James, but he was busy placing a cushion behind Mrs. Lovett's bare back, where it seemed she did not require the therapeutic value of the sun. Harriet rather thought the boatman winked at her, but she was not certain, and soon after that she began to feel very queer. She wanted to go home, but James had just caught a half-pound fish of some sort, and so they stayed. Stayed, that is, until Harriet was violently sick over the side of the boat.

After that Mrs. Lovett kindly insisted on going

in, but Harriet, lying flat on the bottom of the boat, felt once more that an unspoken conversation was going on above her.

"Just when they were starting to bite. It's a shame."

"She knew better. She knows she gets seasick."

"One thing, she won't come again."

"She will *not*."

It was the boatman who folded up his coat, smelling faintly of fish, long-dead shrimps, gasoline and ham and cabbage, and put it under Harriet's head. James was wearing his coat. When Harriet looked up she could see him, rested and virile from sun and wind and golf, sitting very erect. She saw something else, also. She saw that when Mrs. Lovett's eyes rested on him, which they did rather frequently, James would draw in his—well, what Charlotte called his tum-tum, and throw out his chest.

Harriet was feeling terrible, and a hot wave of resentment welled up in her.

"Doesn't that tire you, James?"

"Doesn't *what* tire me?"

"Holding in your stomach like that?"

There was positive hatred in James's face as he looked at her, but fortunately Mrs. Lovett spied a turtle just then.

"Oh, look! The darling thing!"

"They say them things cry when they lay their eggs," said the boatman sociably. "It must hurt something awful. Like having a—"

Here James coughed, however, and the rest was lost.

Shut in her room, then, Harriet took stock. Her mirror told her she looked dreadful, but she lacked the spirit to smack her contour with anything. What she really wanted to smack was James. She went over the past; all those years of service, to what end? Putting out his clean linen, fixing his studs, mending his socks, nursing his lumbago, watching over him, mothering him! No wonder he called her mother. Men didn't want mothers. They wanted—well, they wanted the Mrs. Lovetts.

"Dear Mr. Emory, *do* you mind seeing if I left my bag in the dining room?" And James trotting fatuously off, only to have Mrs. Lovett discover that she had had it all the time.

Well, she'd Mrs. Lovett him, if that was what he wanted!

She put on the rose-colored dress that night, first ripping out the lace modesty piece across the front. She felt chilly and rather bare, but she knew she looked very nice. When she went down to dinner, however, James gave a long look.

"That dress is too low, Harriet."

"Is it? But I thought the human body—"

"Very well, if you *like* to exhibit yourself! But I tell you, here and now, you can eat alone unless you get a shawl or something to cover you."

She made a terrible effort, and smiled up at him à la Lovett.

"All right, dear. Do you mind getting me my silk one? It's in the upper bureau drawer."

There was, however, nothing fatuous in the James who stalked up the stairs, and returning thrust the shawl at her.

"Put it on and let's get in," he said. "I'm hungry."

And he was. All Harriet's preconceptions of men illegitimately infatuated with women failed her before that. Never before had James so eaten, so slept. She herself could not eat at all. Her mouth was always dry and her throat tight. James and Mrs. Lovett both ate heartily, indeed, and after coffee James, who disapproved of women smoking, would pass Mrs. Lovett a cigarette and light it, and then take one himself.

It was that night that Harriet astounded James by asking for one too. He pretended not to hear her, but she repeated it, and then he refused her.

"Do have some dignity, Harriet," he said. He always called her Harriet now. It was as though to call her mother would emphasize his own paternity.

"You don't mind other women smoking, apparently."

"That is their affair."

"And this is mine," said this new Harriet, and reached out and took one. She choked and coughed, of course, and James kept his eyes averted from the horrid spectacle. Mrs. Lovett tried to smooth things over.

"There's a wonderful new moon tonight. We ought to go out and see it."

James brightened, but Harriet was too quick for him.

"Certainly we ought," said Harriet, taking a sip of water. The smoke had given her hiccoughs. "I adore walking—hic—in the moonlight. Don't you, James?"

James grunted, but later on it developed that James was not coming. He had a blister on his heel. What he thought was that Harriet needed a good night's sleep. She was nervous. She wasn't like herself. Furthermore, he had promised the girls she was to have plenty of sleep. He even put his hand on her shoulder. Something had softened him. Maybe it was the sight of Mrs. Lovett, alone in all that crowd, and looking lonely; fearfully, dreadfully lonely.

"Now you go up and get a good night's sleep," he said, and patted her.

Harriet was routed. She went upstairs and sat by her window, which was very small and admitted

the minimum of air. She had lost James. At any time now he would come to her with his whole being transformed—not that it was easy to think of James transformed, but she managed it—and break the news to her. Gently but firmly. Not even holding in his turn-turn.

Half an hour later James and Mrs. Lovett passed under the window. He had her by the elbow to steady her, and he was saying firmly:

"So long as our standards of living are higher than those of Europe—"

When, at a decently early hour, James came up to bed even he saw that there was something odd in the way she looked at him. He looked to see if there was anything wrong with his clothes.

"Just as well you didn't go out," he said. "There's a lot of wind."

"Oh! So you went out."

"Only for a breath of air." He kissed her perfunctorily. "Now, you'd better go to sleep."

"I wish I'd go to sleep and never wake up!"

But he was in his own room by that time, carefully winding his watch. Winding James's watch was a ritual. He did not hear her.

She could not sleep. At two o'clock she got up and took a sleeping tablet. James had been snoring peacefully for hours. She stood with the box in her hand and listened to him. Suppose she took two?

Or even three? Not a fatal dose; just enough to scare James, to scare him and bring him back to her? Suppose she slept and slept, and James would hang over her, begging them to bring her back to him? He would remember, then, their long years together. He would be frightened, and sorry.

She popped three more into her mouth, took a long drink of water, for they were extremely bitter, and then went back to her bedroom. She was rather frightened, but she proceeded to set her stage. She straightened the bureau and the bedclothes, and changed into her best nightgown, all hand-made, even the tucks. Then she brushed her hair and put a few drops of perfume behind her ears and on the pillow, and at last she crawled into bed, being careful to leave the coverings straight and tidy, and closed her eyes.

When she opened them James was standing by the bed.

"Now that's something like it!" he said cheerfully. "Do you know how long you've slept?"

"No."

"It's three o'clock! I've played eighteen holes of golf and had lunch and the dining room's closed. I've had them send you some cold ham and potato salad."

"Thanks. I'm not hungry."

"The potato salad's very good. You'll like it. Just enough onion."

He was feeling very amiable, she saw. Not because she was still with him, having brushed the skirts of the beyond, but because the salad had been good and his golf better. Or Mrs. Lovett's worse. One couldn't tell. He had made a bad drive on the eighth, but recovered with his brassie, and he had sunk an eighteen-foot putt. But his feet were blistered, so she got out of bed and found the adhesive plaster for him, and dusted a little talcum in his stockings. She felt a trifle dizzy when she bent over.

She got a letter from Clara the next day. Charlotte never wrote letters.

"Eddie and I are so happy to think that you are having such a happy time. Did father notice the rose dress? But of course he did. Charlotte said he looked quite gay and handsome when you started, and I know he is making you rest and get plenty of sleep."

Harriet put the letter down. For the first time Clara grated on her. She thought Clara was a sentimental fool.

At the end of ten days Harriet had lost eleven pounds. Her body looked quite slim—for Harriet—and her face looked much older and rather haggard. James, on the other hand, looked better and better.

He even looked younger, especially when he had his collar on. It seemed to hold up his face. Harriet, of course, could not wear a collar.

Mrs. Lovett, who was very friendly with her, told her how much better James was looking.

"I don't let him get overtired," she assured Harriet. "When I see that he is flagging I simply pretend I've had enough. And of course you know how thoughtful he is. He stops at once."

It was as though Harriet and Mrs. Lovett had changed places.

Harriet wrote home faithfully. She had plenty of time.

"Your father is improving every day. Most of the men are scratch golfers, so he has found a very nice woman to play with him. He eats and sleeps splendidly. I myself find the climate rather enervating, but I am getting lots of rest."

Clara read that letter to Eddie: "Aren't they *precious*?" she said. "Can't you just see them? It's a real honeymoon."

Charlotte, however, read the letter twice. Then she wrote:

"You're not quite so cheerio, are you, Harriet darling? What's wrong? Has the golfing female ensnared James? If she has, don't worry. It's probably doing him worlds of good. Poor dears, they do like to think they are faithful, not because they

have to be, but because they want to. But if it's only the climate, come home. The house is going straight to perdition without you, and I may too any day."

She broached going home, to James that day, but he vetoed it firmly.

"Why?" he inquired. "I'm just settling down. Besides, I've given Miss Sanders a holiday, and she needs it. I don't intend to call her back."

So there was Harriet, hung like Mahomet's coffin between Mrs. Lovett and Miss Sanders. Because, if James could be such a fool about one, why not the other? Terrible visions floated through her mind; Miss Sanders in James's office looking up at him coyly, and James holding in his turn-turn and throwing out his chest. James offering Miss Sanders a cigarette and lighting it for her. James ordering in a glass of milk and a doughnut—he did that when he was busy—and ordering another glass of milk and a doughnut for Miss Sanders. Lunching together, in other words.

She felt very queer all that day. She felt as though she had been living beside a volcano—James being more or less the volcano—for twenty-four years, and had never known it until now. He had seemed like a peaceful green hill, but underneath all the time had been terrible and devastating fires.

She retired early. James was teaching Mrs. Lovett chess, and almost the last thing she heard was Mrs.

Lovett's high, rather shrill voice from the card room.

"Of course! How stupid of me!"

"Not stupid at all," said James gallantly, and in his voice was the ring of superiority, of magnanimity, of the strong toward the weak. "Not stupid at all."

It was a hot night. James did not come up to bed, and Harriet lay there thinking dreadful things. She was quite certain that Mrs. Lovett was in love with James, and utterly shameless. Suppose—suppose she lured James out into the exotic night, and he would kiss her! True, it was hard to think of James in this romantic attitude, but stronger men than James had been lured by sirens.

The vision persisted. She saw the two of them outside, on the shore or under a palm tree, and Mrs. Lovett had her hand on James's arm and was holding up her face. She was quite capable of it. In fact, although she was not a small woman, she always looked up at James as though he towered above her. And Harriet saw James holding back and then yielding, bending over, kissing her. Maybe twice. And after that they would share this guilty secret between them; they would sit at the table in the dining room with her, pretending everything was all right.

James would scan the menu carefully.

"Clam broth, I think. And some fish and cucumbers."

And they would be together in spirit under the palm tree or wherever it was, and she would be alone.

So she put on a dressing gown and slippers, and went down by the back staircase. She walked cautiously around outside glancing in at the windows, but the lower floor was deserted and the night watchman was putting out the lights. Then from a dark corner of the veranda she heard James's voice. They were there. Porch or shore or palm tree, what did it matter? What did it matter that James seemed to be discussing the Federal Income Tax? What did anything matter? Sooner or later Mrs. Lovett would hold up her face.

Blindly she went on, down to the pier, out on the pier. She had no plan, except possibly to look at the water and imagine what it would be like to end it all; James standing by her bier and seeing clearly what he had driven her to, and plenty of flowers around, and her permanent wave nicely fixed and her hands folded.

When it flashed over her that this would leave James free, and that it was a well-known fact that the men who lost good wives were always the ones to marry again quickly, it was too late. She was already falling in.

With her first gasp she inhaled a great deal of water, and this, as it turned out, was unfortunate, for when she came to the surface she could not yell. She tried, but she only gurgled. As for all one's past flashing before one under such circumstances, that was complete and utter bosh. Harriet was concentrated on two things, on breath to breathe and on keeping in a horizontal position.

But at last she realized that this last was not possible. She was lost. She was doomed. Her feet were weighted down with lead. In vain she struggled to keep them up. They went down and down, until at last they rested on the muddy bottom. And then Harriet walked ashore.

When James glanced in shortly after to see if she was asleep, her light was out and everything was quiet. There was however an odd sound of dripping water from somewhere. Harriet heard him in the bathroom, examining the shower, and later on the radiator. Then he apparently glanced out to see if it was raining, and after that he went to bed, apparently still puzzled.

When he was asleep she got up cautiously and wrung out her kimono and her night dress. She had lost her slippers.

Harriet stayed in bed the next day. After all, what was there to get up for? James seemed vaguely uneasy and puzzled. All his life was built on a

Harriet who hustled around in the mornings and got everybody started. Also the laundry had come back, and his best shirt still lacked a button and his golf hose needed darning. He mentioned these matters to Harriet, but she seemed to lack interest.

"You have plenty of shirts."

"I haven't plenty of golf stockings."

"You don't have to play golf all the time."

James was upset. There was a look in Harriet's face he had not seen before. It was a look of—well, almost of dislike. He felt aggrieved and rather queer, and Mrs. Lovett rallied him gently on his game that morning.

It was two or three days before Harriet began to mend James's clothes and sew on his buttons again. Why should she turn out a James neat and dapper to impress another woman? She wondered about this, as possibly a good many wives have wondered before her, and since. But the really important thing is that the more she thought about James the less she liked him. She felt a little lost, but that was only habit. In four weeks he had thrown away twenty-four years. She told herself that she could have forgiven a great passion, but she could not forgive dalliance through vanity. And she let him put in his own studs and cuff-links, and hunt his own pajamas at night. It cheered her perceptibly when she heard him searching for them. It was a

game with the chambermaid, who hid them in a new place each day, but James took it as an affront.

Perhaps James was not altogether happy. Certainly he was puzzled, and if Mrs. Lovett had not been very careful she would have beaten him at golf. Also, what with the fact that often there were no caddies, and of course Mrs. Lovett could not carry her own bag, and also with sitting for hours in a constrained position in a fishing boat, his back was troubling him again.

He walked into Harriet's room one day and told her about it, but she only said:

"Really? That's too bad."

"Right here," he said plaintively. "In the old place."

But she did not insist on his going to bed so she could rub it. She said, without any tact whatever:

"Perhaps you're doing too much, at your age."

"My age! What's that got to do with it? Where's the hot water bottle?"

The old Harriet would have leaped to her feet, found it and filled it. But this new Harriet did not move.

"I imagine it's in the bathroom. Are you going to take it fishing?"

"I'm going to bed," said James coldly and retired, slamming the door.

It was three or four days later—James's back was

better, although he grunted sometimes when teeing up Mrs. Lovett's ball—that the lady in question proposed an island picnic.

"In the evening," she said. "I *do* so love Nature at night. And then the big round moon comes up and—"

"There won't be a full moon for days," said James, rather gruffly. She had insisted on repeating her bad drives that morning, and that meant stooping twice on almost every tee.

"There will be stars."

"You can see them from here. Why hunt a miserable island?"

But she was insistent, and Harriet, who knew that James loathed a picnic, suddenly seconded her.

"Why, of course," she said. "We can cook supper on the beach, and James can gather the firewood."

James looked at her rather nastily, but Mrs. Lovett was in modified ecstasies; modified, because she had certainly not expected Harriet to go.

"Lovely!" she said. "And we can look for shells. I adore shells. They are so—so mysterious."

"There is no mystery about a shell," James began sonorously, and then and there delivered to Mrs. Lovett quite a fine address on shells. Mrs. Lovett sat with her eyes on him, tensely listening. Now and then she had to blink, but that was all, and to Harriet the dining room was a sea of faces, turned

on James and Mrs. Lovett, and observing Mrs. Lovett's eyes fixed on James.

So they went on the picnic. But it was evident from the moment of landing that Mrs. Lovett's idea of a picnic was to share it, and such mysteriousness in shells as James had left her, with James only, while Harriet stooped over the fire and fried the bacon. Harriet was aware that she was not at her best, stooping, and a wind had come up and blew smoke into her eyes. But she caught a certain reluctance in James to go off and gather shells. His blisters were bothering him again, and he had had that day a faint—just a faint—suggestion of lumbago once more. Harriet, blinking smoke out of her eyes, could see James gallantly bending to pick up shells, and while Mrs. Lovett gave small shrieks of ecstasy, putting a hand stealthily to his back.

Later on it was the boatman who said the wind was rising and they'd better get home; but Mrs. Lovett, leaving Harriet and the boatman to clean up after supper, took her dainty and unimpaired self—and James—to look at the sunset. Harriet was not certain, but she thought once more that the boatman glanced at her and winked. It was as though he said: "Don't you worry. The woods are full of them. We're on to them, you and I."

And between Harriet and the boatman there was a bond of understanding as they cleaned up.

The wind was quite high when the sunset-gazers came back, and Mrs. Lovett almost refused to get into the boat. There were small whitecaps everywhere, and she caught James's arm and said she was terrified. But if James was thrilled at the contact he did not show it. He was cold and his back hurt, and he had eaten too many baked beans. Mrs. Lovett had insisted on having baked beans, but they always disagreed with him. Besides, he had worn his best flannel suit, and now his pockets bulged with shells. Every time he moved he clattered. Also he had a cactus barb in his thumb.

"Let's get home," he said brusquely. "It's likely to be worse before it's better."

Under protest Mrs. Lovett prepared to climb into the boat, which was far from stationary. James boosted her, but here a sad thing happened. A large wave struck the boat, Mrs. Lovett clutched and shrieked, and the next instant she was sitting in some two feet of water.

She screamed and staggered to her feet, fixing James with a furious eye.

"Well, of all the idiotic things to do!"

"Sorry!" said James stiffly. "We'd better get home as quickly as possible."

"Home?" she said. "In all that wind, and soaking wet? Never. You'll have to gather some wood for a fire, and dry me. I'm certainly not going to

catch my death of cold. Besides, if the sea's like that, this boat's too small."

"It's the only boat we have," said James.

"It's not the only boat we can get. Let that man go back and get a real boat. That thing's not safe."

Harriet had said nothing. She was watching Mrs. Lovett, as Charlotte had put it, doing James worlds of good. At the same time, however, she felt that the boatman's eyes were fixed on her.

"I'll tell you," said that gentleman. "This lady isn't afraid. Let her go back with me and get some dry clothes. Then, if I can find a cabin cruiser I'll bring it back, and everybody's happy."

And so it was settled. When the boat pushed off Harriet had her first feeling of pity for James in a month; the wind was howling, and anything more inhospitable than the dusky island could hardly have been imagined.

"Better stay on the beach," the boatman bawled through his hands. "Rattlesnakes!"

Harriet was certain Mrs. Lovett squealed, but as the wind too was squealing she was not sure.

They were an hour getting back. The wind had died as quickly as it had risen, and the boatman, carrying his tiller ropes, came back and squatted on the gunwhale beside her.

"Fog coming," he said. "Don't know as any cruiser would try that channel in a fog."

"No?" said Harriet. "Still, we'll have to rescue them."

"Far as that goes," said the boatman, "I don't know as I could pick up that beach myself in a fog."

She felt that he was looking at her again.

"If the worst comes, it won't kill them to stay there all night. It's happened before this, and no trouble."

"It would be very bad for Mr. Emory," Harriet said firmly. "He's subject to lumbago."

The fog was certainly coming down, but she thought she caught a flash of the boatman's teeth in the darkness.

"Picking up all them shells wouldn't help it any."

"No," she said. And because that sounded abrupt, "no."

"Well, it takes all sorts to make a world," said the boatman. "That Mrs. What's-er-name, now. I'll bet she'd carry on something awful if she had to stay the night there, eh?"

There was something conspiratorical in his tone, and Harriet knew she should be firm, should repudiate him, should hurry back to the hotel and summon help; should save James, in other words. But suddenly she did not want to save James. She wanted James left on the island all night, with Mrs.

Lovett carrying on something awful and rattle-snakes in the brush.

"I can only trust you to do all you can."

"You just leave it to me, ma'am. I'll get your husband back to you safe and sound."

That too sounded cryptic to Harriet. She felt, walking back through the fog to the hotel, distinctly guilty and certainly more cheerful than she had felt *for some time*. It was as though, having been wretched herself for so long, she had now transferred her wretchedness to James. It shows, too, the strange cruelty which is buried in all women, that she was glad to find that she still had James's matches. His only matches. She had borrowed them to light the fire while he and Mrs. Lovett hunted shells. Let them hunt shells now! Let them sit on shells! Let James try to rest his lumbago on shells! Shells. There was no sand on that island, only shells.

She took a hot bath and went placidly to bed. The fog had softened her skin so that it looked quite girlish, and the lines of strain had gone. For a time she listened to hear the chug-chug of a motor boat starting out into the fog, but there was a deep and peaceful silence over everything. After a time she crawled out and smeared her face thickly with cold cream. Then she went back to bed and went quietly to sleep.

The slamming of the door awakened her the next morning, and she roused to see James just inside, surveying her with a bitter and jaundiced eye. There was nothing dapper about James just then. There was indeed, under his anger, something distinctly sheepish, even anxious.

She sat up in bed and surveyed him.

"Well!" she said. "This is a nice hour to be getting home."

"What the devil did you expect me to do? Swim?"

"Do you mean to tell me you've been on that island all night? With that woman?"

James advanced stiffly into the room.

"Now, see here, Harriet," he said, "don't be an idiot. Nobody came for us. There was a fog. As for that woman—of all the damn fools I've ever seen or heard of, she's the worst. I don't want to talk about her, that's all."

"But I think we *must* talk about her, James," said Harriet, settling herself comfortably into her pillows. "If she feels that she is compromised—"

"Compromised! Good God, she's forty-five years old."

"Oh, hardly that," said Harriet, trying to keep the contentment out of her voice. "She's attractive, and of course it does look queer for her, after the way you've been running after her."

"Running after her!" said James, astounded. "You're crazy. You've lost your mind. You've kept throwing her at me to look after ever since we got here, but I'm through."

Harriet looked at him. He believed that. He could make himself believe anything so long as it justified him. She might set him right, but what was the use?

James advanced a foot or two further toward the bed. He was very stiff; she could see that. She saw, however, something else. James was looking at her, actually seeing her again. It was as though he had not really seen her for a long time. As though for years and years he had not seen her, and now he had discovered her again. He even made a move to bend over and kiss her, a thing he had not done, except for good nights and birthdays and journeys, for a very long time. He got part way down, and then he yelped.

Harriet lay still and watched him. He could not straighten up, but she did not offer to help him.

"What you need is bed and some sleep, James," she said coolly. "You're nervous. If you get a good sleep you'll feel better."

He saw no irony in that, but what he did see was that Harriet was a cold-hearted and selfish woman, who cared nothing for him; who could lie callously in bed and let him suffer. She had left him all night

on that island to suffer, while she slept peacefully. Something had happened to Harriet. For all the sympathy she was showing she might be, not his wife, but some strange woman. Mrs. Lovett, for instance. James shuddered at the thought. The woman was a fool and a lunatic. She had kept his coat all night, borrowed his only handkerchief to cry into, and when he had wanted to wander down the beach to get away by himself for a moment she had screamed and said she wouldn't be left alone, and had gone along.

With what joy and relief had he hobbled back to Harriet, Harriet who had sense, who had no temperament, who never got on his nerves; Harriet, who would leap to his rescue, rub his poor back, get him warmed and fed and comforted. Harriet, Harriet.

And now Harriet was lying back among her pillows, looking at her fingernails.

"I really *must* get a manicure," she said thoughtfully.

James, still humped over, tottered toward his room. At the door he stopped.

"I'm ready to leave this place, whenever you are."

"But it's doing you so much good!"

"Do I look as if it's done me good?"

"I think it has," said Harriet judiciously. "Still,

if you want to go—! Of course it will be a day or two before you're able to pack."

He gave her a long look. He had never packed for himself, not since they had been married. But Harriet had picked up a hand glass and was surveying herself in it. "I do think the sea air has helped my skin," she said complacently.

James took a long breath.

"I'm sorry you have been worried, Harriet," he said. "The thing was simply unfortunate."

"But I didn't worry," she said, looking at him with her candid eyes. "I slept all night. I don't know when I've slept so well."

It was then that James hobbled out and slammed the door.

Some time later she got up and went into his room. He was in bed, with his shoes and trousers on, having been unable to remove them, and as he lay there the slight bulge about his waistline was conspicuous. Harriet, however, did not notice it. All she saw was James's eyes, the hurt and puzzled eyes of a small boy who has been unjustly punished.

She drew a long breath and set to work. As she rubbed James's back she lost the last four weeks and regained the twenty-four years of James's faithfulness.

"How does that feel?"

"Wonderful, mother. Wonderful." He reached

out feebly and patted her hand. "How on earth you could think I was interested in that Lovett woman—or any other woman—I don't know."

"It *was* silly of me," said Harriet.

When they got out of the train on their return Clara clutched Eddie by the arm.

"There they are!" she said. "Aren't they simply great? Can't you see they've had a beautiful time? And look!" she squealed, "mother's reduced! She's lost pounds!"

"Old boy looks pretty fit."

"Here we are, mother! Here we are. Was it a wonderful trip?"

"Splendid," said Harriet, smiling brightly.

But Charlotte said little or nothing. She gave Harriet a hard look and then a harder squeeze. There was something uncanny about Charlotte's understanding.

"Glad you're back," she said casually. "There's mutiny among the domestics and the adenoidal Sanders is going to be married. Can you imagine it?"

Harriet glanced at her quickly, but Charlotte was looking at James.

"Had a good time, father?"

"Nothing exciting," said James. "I got some exercise and your mother had a good rest. That's about all."

THE PAPERED DOOR

The small frame house was drafty. Air currents moved the curtains at the windows and billowed the cheap rug on the floor. The baby had the croup, and this had given her an excuse for being up, for the roaring fire in the kitchen stove, and for the lighted lamp.

Early in the evening she had sent over to the doctor's for medicine. The drug store was closed and a curious crowd had gathered in front of it. The doctor dispensed his own prescriptions and had sent back with the bottle a kindly note:

"Dear Molly, if we can do anything, let us know. Would you like Ann to spend the night with you?"

But she had not wanted Ann. The eight-year-old girl had gone back with a message that she thought she could manage nicely. The thought of Ann's prying eyes made her shudder.

Then the quiet night had settled down on them. Sometime after eleven, moving about the overheated room, she had paused and glanced out of the window. The kitchen was in an ell and so she could see across the street. There was some one

standing still there; a shadow, and what seemed to be the end of a lighted cigar.

She knew then that the house was being watched.

She dropped the curtain and stood still. Queer memories came to her; the day they had moved into the house, and Jim papering the kitchen. They had lighted a great fire, like this one, to dry the paste. She would spread the paste on the paper, and Jim would take it from her. He had laughed over that job; it had seemed like play to him.

By one o'clock, the baby upstairs was breathing easier, and the eight-year-old girl was asleep in her bed, her arms over her head. Molly stood in the doorway, looking at them. Why were there children? They were born only to suffer. Girls especially. But the baby would have his troubles too. Boys grew into men, and were liable to the temptations of men. Violent horrible things happened, because they were men.

She went downstairs again. It was as though she could not stay in any one place. Except for the kitchen the house was very cold, and she picked up a shawl and threw it around her. Outside snow had commenced to fall. It beat against the thin walls and the window panes like fine hard sand.

She shivered in the bleak little hall, but in the kitchen the heat was terrific. After a moment she raised the window, and the man across the street,

now powdered with fine snow, saw her and came over.

"How's the baby?" he asked.

She could see him now. The lamplight streamed out into the empty street, and she recognized him. It was Tom Cooper, one of the county detectives. She knew him well, but now he was a stranger to her; a stranger and an enemy.

"He's asleep."

"That's good."

He stood there awkwardly. For some reason he had taken off his hat, and that alarmed her. He was already showing her the deference of bereavement. She drew herself up, a thin angular figure against the lamp light.

"I got some medicine from the doctor. It's helped him."

"Fine." He seemed at a loss for words. "You'd better go to bed," he said at last. "There's no use of us two staying up. I guess he won't come back while I'm hanging around."

"No," she replied wearily, "he won't come back, Mr. Cooper. That was the last word he said."

The detective coughed, cleared his throat, spat.

"We are all mighty sorry," he observed, using a carefully conversational tone. "These things happen now and then."

"Yes."

"He must have been drinking."

"Maybe. I don't know."

The conversation languished, and she made a move to lower the window. But some instinct of pity, or perhaps something even more significant, caused her to pause.

"I expect you're right cold out there."

"Well, I am not warm," he replied cheerfully. "I am burning up considerable fuel but it doesn't seem to heat much." To show his ease he lighted a fresh stogie. The match flare showed his good-humored face, drawn and strained in spite of his tone.

"You wouldn't care to come in and warm your feet, would you?"

He hesitated. The village street was quiet. Owing to its semi-isolated position, he had commanded all approaches to the house from his vantage point across the street. Once inside— But then again, the house was small and lightly built; one could hear a footfall through it. A man ought to be able to thaw out now and then.

"I don't know but I will for a minute or two, Molly," he assented, "if you'll unlock the door."

But it was not the kitchen door which she unlocked. He could hear her making her way to the front of the house, and when she admitted him it was to the bare shabby parlor.

"I'd just as soon sit in the kitchen."

But she appeared not to hear him. She knelt in front of the polished base burner stove and put a match to the wood laid ready. He eyed her as she knelt there. She was a pretty slender woman, still in her early thirties; a delicate sensitive type, oddly out of place among the buxom village women. She had never mixed successfully with them, he knew. They had been suspicious of her gentility, of the books on her table—she had been a school teacher—of her shy aloofness. After their manner they had predicted calamity as a result of that marriage; and the detective, shaking himself out of his coat, knew that now it had come. Only it was not calamity; it was sheer stark tragedy.

He would have protected her if he could. He had always felt a tenderness for her. Her shyness had drawn him. He liked aloof women. But there was no protection for her now, and perhaps he realized a certain strength in her, a fine-drawn endurance. He looked up at her as he drew his chair to the fire and warmed his half-frozen fingers.

"Just what do you know about it, Molly?"

"Very little, except that it was over that girl."

"You say he hadn't been drinking?"

"Not that I know of. But he'd been ugly all morning. When he started out I begged him to leave his gun with me, but he took it."

There was a silence between them. After a moment she went out to the kitchen again, under pretense of listening for the baby, and put some more coal on the kitchen fire. She stopped long enough to look at one particular portion of the wall, and this she did stealthily, after a glance toward the front of the house. What she saw seemed to satisfy her, for she went back to the parlor again.

"I guess I've only got myself to blame," she said, picking up the conversation where it had left off, and still with that curious casualness of manner. "She's a pretty girl, that girl at Heideger's, and Jim's sociable. Lately, with the baby and the house, I haven't had much time for Jim. I was tired at night, and so—Jim's been hanging around her for quite a while."

Cooper nodded.

"So he took the gun and went out, eh?"

"Not just like that. He often carried a gun. You know, since that hold-up at the plant——"

"And then what?"

"I don't know very much. From what I gather, because with everybody talking all at once I got kind of mixed up, it seems that the clerk from the drug store walked into Heideger's while Jim was there, and asked the girl what she meant by fooling around with a married man. Then he told Jim to come home because his baby was sick. I'd sent over

this afternoon for some ipecac. That was the start. The trouble came then."

"And after the trouble Jim came home," the detective prompted, "and then what, Molly?"

"Then Jim came home," she repeated in her level voice, "and said he was in trouble and he would have to leave town. I gave him all the money I had and got his winter overcoat out. It smelled of moth-balls, but there wasn't time to air it. He put it on and went."

The detective sniffed.

"Moth-balls!" he said. "That's what I've been smelling. You must have spilled them around."

The hands which still held the shawl about her closed convulsively, but her face was quiet.

"I suppose so."

"He didn't say what the trouble was?"

"No. I didn't ask him. I never thought of a shooting. I thought it was the girl."

She was utterly impersonal. He had some faint glimmering, as he sat there, of how life had betrayed her, trapped her and betrayed her. And in the silence he could hear, through the flimsy floor, the baby's croupy cough overhead.

"I suppose men are just naturally unfaithful," she said, when the coughing had ceased.

"Not all men, Molly. This girl, she just got around Jim."

"She was pretty," she agreed, as though that answered all questions. "And I guess they'll say in this town that I drove him to her. A man likes a woman to be gay and cheerful. But the baby's been delicate, and I tire kind of easy myself these days."

For a few moments there was silence in the parlor, save for the creak of the self-rocker in which the detective gently swung himself. He yawned and stretched out his legs.

"You don't mind if I smoke in here?"

"Jim smoked all over the house. Is the drug clerk badly hurt?"

The creaking of the self-rocker stopped. The detective looked hard at his stogie. "Yes, he's pretty bad," he said after a moment. "He's—well, Molly, you will learn it soon enough anyhow. He's dead."

For the first time her self-possession left her. She dropped down limply on one of the terrible plush chairs, and sat turning her wedding ring around her finger.

"Jim didn't say that," she whispered.

"I'm sorry, Molly. He died right off."

"Then it's murder?"

"I'm afraid so."

Out of delicacy he did not glance at her. There was a furtive look about her just then; a recklessness, too. But the detective was busy with his own

thoughts. When at last he glanced at her, her face was as quiet as ever.

"Funny!" he said. "That moth stuff seems stronger than ever!"

"I don't like it. It gives me a headache."

Suddenly he turned to her and put a hand over hers.

"Listen to me, girl," he said. "Don't take this thing too hard. Something of this sort was bound to come sooner or later. If he gets away, you are better without him. If he doesn't——" He threw out his hands. "He has never supported you. You have worked for him, haven't you, and borne his children? What have you had out of it? Try to be sensible. Things are pretty bad just now, but they have been pretty bad for you for the last eight years. It's been drink and gambling and other women, and I am going to tell you the whole thing straight. There is no use cutting off a dog's tail an inch at a time. He shot the girl, too. They are both dead. The sheriff is out with a posse, and there is a thousand dollars on his head. Heideger's offering it."

She sat back, with her eyes closed. But she was not faint. She was thinking. Both of them; Jim had killed them both. Then the girl from Heideger's was gone. She was dead. She would never again come between herself and Jim. Cooper was swaying unhappily in his chair, and the creaking of the

springs said to her quite plainly: Dead, dead, dead.

"Two of them!" she said at last. "Two of them. Oh, my God." But she caught herself up quickly, resumed that strange monotonous casualness of hers. "The drug clerk was a nice young man. I forget his name, but we used to talk about books, and articles in the magazines."

The detective looked at her sharply. She made him uneasy. Finally he eased himself out of his chair.

"Well, I'd better be going," he said awkwardly. "I feel a lot better. I suppose there isn't anything I can do?"

"I'm all right. The doctor gave the baby something to make him sleep. I guess he thought I needed some rest."

Cooper threw the end of his stogie into the stove, drew a revolver from his coat pocket and glanced at it, remembered suddenly that the action was hardly delicate, and thrust it back.

"I suppose he's hardly likely to come back here? There's no reason that you know of, to bring him back?"

"He's not likely to risk his neck to see me again. Or his children," she added, with almost the first bitterness she had shown. But the next moment she was calm again.

"I was thinking," she suggested, "that if I leave

the latch off you could come in now and then and get warm. I can leave a cup of tea on the fender. Do you want milk in it?"

"Sugar, thank you, and no milk," he said. "You were always a thoughtful woman, Molly." There was something almost wistful in his voice. Mindful of the sleeping baby, he closed the door cautiously behind him as he went out.

She stood inside, listening to his feet on the frozen ground outside. Then she went back into the parlor, and from behind the plush sofa retrieved a man's heavy overcoat, redolent of moth preventives. This she carried upstairs and placed carefully behind the baby's crib, and then, closing the door into that room, she went into the kitchen again.

So the girl at Heideger's hotel was dead!

Never again would she flirt with the traveling men at the hotel, passing them with her bold eyes and swaying hips. And never again would she lure Jim with that insolent young body of hers. She felt no pity, but a hard sense of relief. It was as though, now the girl was gone, she could think once more, could plan, even calculate.

The posse was out in the hills after Jim. Following the tragedy he had gone back to the house, hitched the team to the buckboard, and driven furiously out of town. But she knew what the

posse did not; that the wagon was in a field some miles out with a broken wheel, and that Jim Carter was not in the hills.

In the kitchen she moved about methodically, built up the fire again, put on the tea-kettle. She was not tired now. She felt strong, capable of anything. There was real method now in her movements, in the deliberation with which at last she approached that portion of the wall where the paper still showed faintly damp. She lowered her voice.

"Are you all right, Jim? Can you breathe?"

"For God's sake put out that fire, I'm stifling."

"I've got to dry this paper. And anyhow I'm boiling the kettle. Cooper's coming in again for some tea."

"The hell he is!"

She could hear him muttering his disgust and anger from beyond the wall, but she paid no attention.

His hiding place was well conceived, for the night at least. Beside the range there had been a small unlighted closet, with a flat wooden door which fitted close without a frame. Long ago the door had been papered to match the kitchen. It had been the work of only a few moments to take off the lock. After that he had gone inside and drawn the door to behind him, shutting out from her sight his shaking hands and death-colored face. Then,

neatly and with dispatch she had repapered that portion of the wall. The door had disappeared.

Now the paste was almost dry. Let them find the wagon and search the house. For tonight at least Jim was safe. Jim was safe, and the girl from Heideger's was dead.

Her voice was more gentle when she went back to the wall again.

"Maybe if you drilled another hole——" she asked.

"I've drilled a dozen. It's the heat. I'm up against the chimney. What did Cooper say?"

"It's bad news, Jim."

"He's dead?"

"Yes."

She hesitated. He did not know about the girl. Perhaps he did not even know that he had shot her. He had emptied the revolver at the man and then fled, out the back door of the small frame hotel.

She opened her mouth to speak, shut it again. He would know soon enough. As she listened she could hear the soft grinding of the bit stop for a moment, then go on. What was he thinking about in there, fighting for very air to breathe? Was there any grief in him, any remorse? Was he wondering about the girl, afraid to ask her?

But when the sulky voice spoke again it was to

tell her to go out and see if the sawdust outside could be seen.

"If they find that wagon they'll be back."

"There's a big wind, Jim. It will blow away. And it's snowing, too. If I go out Cooper will see me."

She made the tea, crossing and recrossing the little room cautiously. When she came back from placing the cup on the fender of the parlor stove, the querulous voice was speaking from the other side of the partition. "What the devil do you mean by bringing Tom Cooper in here anyhow? He'd sell me out for a plugged nickel."

"As long as he can come and go he'll be sure I've nothing to hide. Listen, Jim. Can you hear me plainly?"

"Yes."

"The doctor sent some sleeping stuff for the baby. Do you suppose Cooper would notice it in a cup of tea?"

"I don't know. You could try it."

"If he would drop off, you know, you might get away yet. On the milk train. They wouldn't be looking for you there."

"I might. If I could get out of this hole——"

The sound of the drill had ceased.

"And if you did, and got settled somewhere, you'd

send for us, Jim, wouldn't you? You'd owe us that, wouldn't you?"

"Sure I'd send for you, Molly. You and the kids."

She listened to that facile promise of his; it did not ring true, and she knew it. She had listened to his promises before. But this time, she told herself, things were different. He had had his lesson. Surely now, in some quiet place——

"If I could get to the barn, I could crawl along Shultz's fence to the side-track, Molly."

"You'll get there," she promised him.

It was some little time later that she realized that the snow was coming down steadily, and she began to watch it. If it kept on it would help him, would cover his tracks. It meant life to him, that snow. But if it stopped——

She did not tell Jim that it was snowing. From behind the papered door he was muttering complaints; of the heat, of his cramped position, of the lack of air.

"I'm suffocating in here!"

"For God's sake, Jim, be still. He may come in any minute."

"What's he coming for? He's always been hanging around you."

That roused her to sharp anger.

"He may be coming because there's a thousand dollars reward on you."

She heard him swearing violently, and then—the wall was paper thin—she heard him sliding cautiously about in that narrow space.

"What are you doing?"

"I'm trying to sit down on the floor. I'm all in, and I'll need my strength."

"Listen, Jim," she said desperately. "Don't go to sleep, will you?"

"God in heaven, do you suppose I'm sleeping tonight?"

"If you hear me cutting the paper just keep quiet. I'll rap three times first, to let you know. Be still! There's some one outside!"

She stood, rigid with terror, but the newcomer turned out to be Mrs. Shultz, from the house next door. She opened the kitchen door and stepped in, her small black eyes blazing with curiosity.

"I thought I heard you talking to some one?"

"The children are wakeful. I was calling up to them."

Mrs. Shultz shook the snow from her shawl, and went to the stove.

"It didn't seem neighborly, me being comfortable in bed and you here in trouble," she said, gazing about the room. "I seen your lamp going, so I told Shultz I was coming over. I see they've got somebody watching the place."

"Tom Cooper." Molly's voice was as casual as

ever. Mrs. Shultz looked at her with cold unfriendliness.

"I'm glad you're taking it so calm. But I guess Jim's been a good bit of worry, from first to last."

"It wouldn't do me any good to scream. Or Jim either."

Mrs. Shultz nodded an agreement. Suddenly she felt an enormous importance, alone in this house of tragedy, with this desolated woman. She could hear herself the next day, and for days and months and years to come: "Yes, I stayed with her that night. She looked terrible, but she was quiet enough. She never had any real feelings anyhow. It was snowing hard, and the police were all about the place. They knew he'd come sneaking back, the dirty murderer."

"I'm going to stay with you," she offered. "I can lay down on the parlor sofa. I guess you don't mind."

But Molly met this coldly and firmly.

"I'm afraid I would mind," she said quietly. "This is a very sad night for me. I should like to be alone; absolutely alone."

"Just like that," Mrs. Shultz said afterwards. "She as good as put me out. And the way Shultz carried on when he had to come down in his night-shirt and let me in!"

The kettle had boiled long since. Now she made the tea, and going carefully upstairs into the chil-

dren's room, she got a bottle from the oak bureau and the overcoat from behind the crib. She worked her way carefully down the stairs, her eyes fixed on the front door, and a moment later she was speaking through the wall again.

"I've put your overcoat behind the woodpile on the back porch, Jim. Your cap's in the pocket."

But there was no answer. Only, from behind the flimsy partition, the faint sounds of deep regular breathing.

She made a small despairing gesture and went back to the table, where stood the bottle and an empty tea cup. "Two drops in a little water. Repeat if necessary in three hours." It was powerful, that bottle. It held sleep for a child, and maybe life for a man. She poured a full half of its contents into the cup, and then hid the bottle inside the clock.

When she had made the tea she tried. It tasted slightly bitter, but if it was very hot—— It was not so bad when she had added the sugar. She stood there, tasting it from a spoon.

After that she cut some bread and spread it, and with plate and cup in her hand she went to the front door and called softly across through the snow.

"Your tea's ready whenever you want it."

Cooper started across the street. Behind her the kitchen clock struck, with a thin metallic ring. It was a very old clock. It had marked in its time

birth and death and the giving in marriage. When the door was opened to wind it and to set its spinning hands the inside of the case smelled of generations of wood fires.

Cooper heard it and smiled at her.

"Only twelve o'clock! Seems like I've been standing out there a thousand years."

His plain good-humored face reproached her. She had always liked him, and she knew—as women do know—of that weakness of his for her. Now she was playing him a dirty trick. It would hurt him, damage him. The hand which held the plate, with the cup resting on it, shook somewhat. And he was keen enough. He noticed that, and he looked at her, confronting her squarely.

"What's the matter, Molly?"

"What isn't the matter?"

"See here, you're playing square with me, aren't you? Jim's not here, is he?"

"The house has been searched once. You can do it again if you like."

That appeared to satisfy him. He drank his tea standing, however, and ate some of the bread, and when he had finished, although he agreed to come back and "sit awhile," he made a final round, passing through the kitchen, where now the paper was dry over the door, and so outside.

It was a bad night. The gale was increasing, driv-

ing the snow before it like small sharp missiles. It caught his hat and sent him running and muttering after it. When he came back Molly was on the kitchen porch, the wind whistling about her thin body.

"Get in there," he said, almost roughly. "Do you want to catch your death?"

He went back to the parlor. It was very warm now, and he turned up the lamp and took off his overcoat. The baby had roused and was whimpering, and Molly had gone upstairs to him.

Cooper called up to her to stay there; to go to bed and get some sleep, and she promised. Down below she heard him noisily yawning, heard him pull his chair closer to the stove and then a long silence.

Molly stood listening at the top of the stairs. There was no movement below and she came down stealthily, carrying the baby's milk bottle as an excuse.

Cooper was sound asleep in the parlor, his head dropped forward on his breast. There was a strong odor of drying wool as his overcoat steamed by the fire.

Still holding the bottle, she crept to the kitchen and tapped lightly three times on the papered door. There was no reply. Her heart almost stopped,

leaped on again, raced wildly. She repeated the signal. Then, desperately, she put her lips to the wall.

"Jim!" she whispered.

There was absolute silence, save for the heavy breathing of the detective in the parlor. Madness seized her. She crept along the narrow passage to the parlor door, and working with infinite caution, in spite of her frenzy, she closed it and locked it from the outside. Then back to the kitchen again, pulses hammering.

The bottle fell off the table and broke with a crash. For a moment she felt as if something in her had given way also. But there came no outcry from the parlor, no heavy weight against the flimsy door.

She got a knife from the table drawer and cut relentlessly through the new paper strips. Then, with the edge of the blade, she worked the door open. Jim was lying in a huddle at the bottom of the closet, where the air hardly penetrated. His face was a purple-red, and his mouth was open and relaxed.

Now indeed she worked in a frenzy. Upstairs the baby had started again; evidently the medicine had ceased to operate. If Cooper heard the child and wakened, everything was over.

She did all the senseless things that women do at

such times; rubbed Jim's wrist to restore his pulse, talked to him, tried to drag him out. And in the end the cooler air revived him. He opened his eyes. They were bloodshot.

"Wha's the matter?" he asked thickly.

"Don't talk, Jim. You know what's wrong. You're trying to get away. Lie still till you get your strength back."

"Away?"

"Don't try to talk, Jim. Can you hear me? Do you understand what I say?"

He nodded.

"Cooper is locked in the parlor, asleep. You can get away now. My God, don't close your eyes again. Listen! You can get away."

"Away from what?" he asked stupidly.

"From the police. Try to remember, Jim. You shot the clerk from the drug store and—the police are after you. There's a thousand dollars on your head."

"The buckboard broke down," he said dully. "The damned wheel broke." He looked around him, relaxed suddenly and sat down. "What's the use?" he said. "I can't get anywhere."

"Of course you can. You can get away, Jim, and start all over again. Then you can send for us."

But he threw her arm away roughly.

"I'm through, and you know it."

"You are if you sit there."

But his head was clearing. She went to listen at the parlor door. When she came back, he was standing up, looking more like himself. He was a handsome fellow with heavy dark hair and dark eyes, a big man as he towered above her in the little kitchen. His face did not indicate his weakness. There are men like that, broken reeds swinging in the wind, who yet manage to convey an impression of strength.

"There isn't a chance, I tell you. Go and call Cooper, and turn me over to him. Then you can claim the reward."

She ignored that. She went to the rear porch, got the overcoat and brought it in.

"By Shultz's fence, you said, Jim, and then to the railroad. The slow freight goes through on toward morning, and if that doesn't stop, there's the milk train. And—Jim, let me hear about you now and then. Write to Aunt Sarah. Don't write here. And don't think once you get away that you're safe. A thousand dollars reward will set everybody in the country looking."

He paused, the overcoat half on. His eyes searched hers furtively.

"There was a girl there," he said slowly. "She was right near when I had this run-in with that fellow. She—I suppose she's all right?"

She managed to control her voice.

"I'm sorry, Jim. You got her, too."

"Not——?"

"She died right off, Jim."

She had expected that it would be a shock, but she was not prepared for the tortured grief which showed in his face. She had known that he was infatuated with the girl, not that he loved her.

"Clara!" he said. "Clara! My little girl!"

She stood looking at him. All his promises had meant nothing. His frenzied efforts at escape had been directed to one end, and one end only; this girl. All the labor, the scheming, so that he might escape to this girl.

He was crying now. She had never seen him cry. Great tears ran down his face and onto his clothes. He moaned under his breath, and the tears continued to run. She stood still. Everything seemed unimportant now, the detective asleep in the parlor, his gun beside him on the table; the baby, coughing croupily above. There was no future for any of them.

"You'd better be going," she said evenly. "You'll just about make it."

But he shook his head.

"I'm not going. Go and tell Cooper I'm here. Tell him I've come back to give myself up."

"It's as bad as that, Jim, is it? I don't mean any-

thing, or the children? She's gone, and so you don't care?"

"I haven't a chance anyhow. Why don't you turn me over and get the reward? You could get away from me, then, and from this damned hole."

"I'm not selling you, Jim."

But his mouth had set in ugly lines.

"Take your choice," he said briefly. "I'll be in the barn. You can turn me over or leave the reward to Cooper. He was always soft on you, anyhow. Maybe you'd like him to have it."

"Jim, for God's sake! I can't bear it."

He pulled himself together, spoke more gently.

"I am not worth it, Molly," he burst out. "I am not worth a thousand dollars alive or dead, but if they're offering that for me, if you had it you could go out West somewhere and nobody would know about you. You could start the kids fresh. That's about the only thing I can do for you—give you a chance to get away and forget you ever knew me."

She was horrified. In the end she went down on her knees, pleading with him, beseeching him. But his eyes were blank, like the eyes of a dying man.

"I'll be in the barn," he said. "You can tell them. And don't let them put anything over on you. That money is yours."

"I'll die first."

But in the end she was forced into a sort of

stunned acquiescence. He was determined on this final act of nobility: with that subtler mind of hers she saw that it gratified him; that he preferred to make this last large gesture. He even planned the thing for her. He would hide in the barn in the loft. The swift snow would soon fill the footprints, but in case she was anxious, she could get up early and shovel a path where he had stepped.

When Cooper awakened she could say she had thought the thing over, that she needed the money, that she would exchange her knowledge for the reward.

"Only you get a paper for it—get a paper from Heideger. He'll bluff it out if he can. He was crazy about—about her. The old fool."

That was his farewell to her. She could hear his feet cautiously crunching through the snow as he made his way to the barn.

She moved like an automaton through the house. She did not dare to think of Jim in the barn, making his final heroic sacrifice, not out of love for her, but because it no longer mattered. She knew that she would never sell him out, but she knew that they would find him there.

In the back of her mind, however, was a new and curious pride in him. He had courage, after all. He was no weakling. Although she did not know it, this final gesture of his had renewed her faith, even

her love. She would cheerfully have died for him just then.

She closed the door and fastened it behind him. Then very carefully she unlocked the parlor door and opened it. Cooper was still in his chair, sunk a little lower perhaps and breathing heavily, the overturned tea-cup on the floor beside him.

She went back to the kitchen and filled a fresh bottle for the baby.

As before, it served as an excuse for her presence; with it on the table near at hand she trimmed carefully the rough-cut edges of the papered door. The inside of the closet was a clear betrayal. Still listening and walking softly, she got a dust brush and pan and swept up the bits of wood and sawdust from the floor. The bit she placed on the shelf, and, turning, pan and brush in hand, faced the detective in the doorway.

He made a quick dash toward the closet.

"What have you got there?" he demanded shortly.

"Don't jump at me like that. I've broken one of the baby's bottles."

She swept past him and out onto the back porch with the pan. When she returned he was smiling sheepishly.

"Sorry," he said, "I didn't mean to startle you. That tea and the heat of the stove put me to sleep. I've been half frozen. I guess it was the bottle

breaking that wakened me. I thought you said you would go to bed."

"I couldn't sleep," she evaded, "and about this time the baby always has to be fed."

She took the bottle of milk from the table and set it inside the tea-kettle to warm. Every vestige of suspicion had died from the man's eyes. He yawned again, stretched, compared the clock with his watch.

"It's been a long night," he said. "Me for the street again. Listen to that wind. I'm sorry for anyone that's out in the mountains tonight."

He went into the parlor and, putting on his overcoat, stood awkwardly in the little hall.

She faced him, the child's bottle in her hand.

"I guess you know how I hate this, Molly," he said. "I—I—this isn't the time for talk and there ain't any disloyalty in it, but I was pretty fond of you at one time. I guess you know it, and—I am not the changing sort. I have never seen anybody else I liked the same way. It doesn't hurt a woman to know a thing like that. Good night."

She stood gazing at the door where it had closed behind him. He was a good man, and he cared for her. A woman would be safe with him. But she brushed the thought away. How could she, with Jim heroically awaiting the end in the barn? What-

ever he had been, Jim was earning now her loyalty, her lasting memories.

Already, as she climbed the stairs slowly to lie down on the top of her bed, she was planning his defense against the law, selling things to raise the money, preparing to immolate herself if necessary.

"I wouldn't live with him as his wife. I didn't want any more children. That's what drove him to her."

The jury would understand that. They would be men.

The baby cried hoarsely and she gave him his bottle, lying down on the bed beside him and taking his head on her arm. He dropped asleep there and she kept him close for comfort. She lay there, planning.

The deadly problem of the poor, inextricably mixed as it is with every event of their lives, complicating birth, adding fresh trouble to death—the problem of money confronted her. Jim had been, in town parlance, "a poor provider," but at least she had managed. Now very soon she would not have that resource.

To get Jim off, and then to get away from it all! She drew a long breath. From the disgrace, from the eyes of her neighbors, the gossip, the constant knowledge in every eye that met hers that her husband had intrigued with another woman and killed

her. To start anew under another name and bring her children up in ignorance of the wretched past, that was her dream. And as she dreamed it she finally fell asleep. It was at daylight that she was awakened by a light crash. The baby had thrown his bottle out of bed.

But when she looked the bottle was beside him and not broken. She was not frightened. The alarm clock on the dresser said four-thirty, and on the minute she heard the milk train whistling for the switch. It was still very dark; a gray dawn with snow blowing like smoke through the trees.

Cooper was not in sight.

Suddenly she was desperate. The events of the night before were incredible. Jim must catch that train, get away, anywhere. He had been crazy last night, and so had she.

She ran down the stairs and out toward the barn, stumbling through the snow, running, panting. The milk train waited for ten minutes on the siding. If Jim could get there——

But halfway to the barn she saw Tom Cooper coming across the Shultz pasture toward her. He was walking slowly, with his head down. And far away, by the track, she could make out dimly a group of men.

She stood waiting patiently, the wind wrapping her cotton dress about her. She knew before the

detective reached her, and she waited with the eyes of a woman who has lost her last illusion. Jim's gesture had been only a gesture, after all.

"They've got him?"

"Yes. He was crawling onto the train, and somebody saw him."

"Is he there?"

"Yes, Molly."

"I'd better go to him. He'll need somebody."

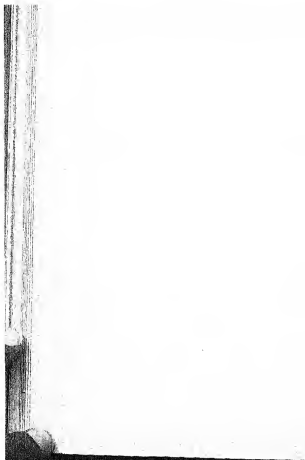
But Cooper held her back.

"He's all right, Molly. I reckon it's just as well for him. Somebody got excited, and—I guess he never knew about it."

She stood quite still. From the house there came the sound of the baby, wailing, and suddenly she turned back. Cooper said nothing. He fell into step beside her, and so side by side they entered the house.

OF YOUNG MANHOOD

Red Rides It Out
An Error In Treatment
The Trumper Sounds



RED RIDES IT OUT

Red sat on the bank of Tunder Creek, fishing for trout. The Prairie Lily sat beside him. Mostly she simply sat, staring with one bright eye alternately at the water where it rushed over the dam, and again at Red's tin tobacco box. Sometimes she nibbled a blade of grass, but with a divided interest. It was the tobacco box which really engrossed her.

Living as she mostly did in Red's pocket, the Prairie Lily was familiar with such boxes, and just now she was doggedly endeavoring to remove the lid of the tin. As Red alternately cast and reeled in she worked industriously, and when Red next looked about the lid was off and all his angleworms were disappearing in the grass.

"Suffering cats, Lil!" he yelled. And Bill the Bear, who had been patiently waiting on the bank to get any trout below the legal limit of six inches, lumbered over to see what was the trouble.

"Lay off there, Bill!" Red warned him. But the trout had been few, and the worms were juicy and slightly salty to the taste.

Bill licked them up one after the other, and then sitting down on his haunches, eyed Red expectantly.

"You get the hell out of here!" Red roared. "You can't have fish if you eat the bait, you darned fool!"

But Bill only scratched himself reflectively and licked his lips, which were still pleasantly salty, or whatever it was.

Red took down his rod and, picking up the Prairie Lily, put her in his pocket, from where, now and then sticking her head up, she gave vent to a small bark of defiance at Bill the Bear. When she barked her ridiculous tail jerked up and down and her small nose pointed to the sky. But Bill the Bear ignored her. The Prairie Lily was only a prairie dog.

It was a Sunday evening, and on Sunday evenings the dudes, who had been riding hell-for-leather all over the country all week, were obliged to rest their horses. It was the Old Man's order, and therefore to be obeyed. The corral outfit, too, had its Sunday evenings off. All the week long they had roped horses out of the corral, saddled them, lifted heavy and unwieldy Easterners onto them, and then had waited with a certain uneasiness until they had turned the corner by the ranch store. For nobody knew just when a dude would scratch a touchy animal with his spurs and then and there give an exhibition of unpremeditated pitching and bucking to the assembled crowd. Or when the boys at the woodpile would start the gasoline motor and the

circular saw would begin to scream, with resulting disaster to the novices.

And so Red was having his evening off, and the tired horses were spread through the great upper meadow, grazing and resting their saddle-worn backs. Blacks, whites, bays, chestnuts, roans, buckskins, sorrels and pintos, and even the Old Man's Palamina—they were hardly more than varicolored dots on the side of the steep pasture below the mountains. Red viewed them with a certain satisfaction. The Old Man had been improving his stock lately.

"Pretty good bunch of horses," he thought absently, while he fastened Bill's collar and chain. "Pretty good grass still too."

His mind wandered on to those later days when the pastures would be dried and brown in the August sun; when the horses of the cavy, driven out for the night, would go with drooping heads and heavy stumbling feet to their futile search for grass; when the hay tossed into the corral at noon would last only an hour or two, and the cans of gall cure for cinch sores would be in constant requisition. By that time the dudes would be hardened to the saddle, and as the grass failed and the horses wearied would be taking long all-day trips in the mountains.

"I don't know what's the matter with Laddie. He hasn't any life in him at all any more."

"Maybe you been ridin' him too hard," Red would say in his soft Texas voice.

"Any horse ought to be able to go twenty or twenty-five miles a day."

"Not in the mountains," Red would say. "Try him out on the flat for a day or two."

And so, instead of slow and tortuous mountain climbing, Laddie would be cantered hard over the meadows and come in covered with white lather day after day, to hunt grass all night instead of resting. And in the barn now and then Red would slip him a surreptitious feed of oats.

"It's the hell of a life for a horse," he reflected, gazing at the high dotted pasture.

But his thoughts were really not on the horses, nor on the Prairie Lily and Bill. They were, to be honest, fixed with a singular concentration on a new girl who had arrived a couple of days before. There was something about her—Red frowned with the effort to discover what it was.

"She sure knows horses," he decided finally. "She sure does. Most of these dude girls now——"

He frowned, and warmed by the effort of dragging Bill past a cabin where the day before he had stolen and eaten a box of candy, he stopped and took off his heavy hat. In the afterglow his hair blazed like a miniature prairie fire.

"She sure knows horses," he repeated in an inar-

ticulate attempt to put into words the strange feeling which seemed to crowd his breathing. "She sure does."

He sighed heavily and pulled Bill along.

"Come on, little feller," he said gently. "Time you put those fish inside of you to bed."

He moved along, Bill padding sedately beside him. His thoughts wandered.

If only a fellow had some money, and could take over the Old Man's polo string! There was a heap of money in polo ponies. The Old Man was only giving it up because he found dudes easier. And he was getting on, too, the Old Man was. Soon be fifty! Red sighed again.

He thought of his own small ranch, so carefully homesteaded through three long and weary years, and of the Old Man's promising string spread out over it. He saw the drive to the railroad and the loading, and the long trip East, with himself living in the caboose of the fast freight and getting out at every way station to wander forward to his car.

"Nice lot you've got in there, Red."

"Yeah. Taking them East to the Meadowbrook Hunt."

And then back home again, and——

"I could raise enough hay in the bottom land for winters," he planned. "And I could run water from the spring. No woman ought to have to carry

water. Hell! What's the matter with me tonight?"

He was in the heart of the ranch settlement by that time. It looked like a small town nowadays, he reflected. He could remember when the first dudes came and gradually overflowed the ranch house, so that streets of tent houses had gradually radiated from it like the spokes of a wheel. But now the tents were gone and small cabins had taken their places. Even the old bunk house had had a sitting room added to it by popular subscription. But Red surveyed this latter with a certain moroseness.

"No use goin' home, Bill," he muttered. "Those dude girls will be hangin' around for a coupla hours yet."

He grunted. He could see that sitting room, with the phonograph going, and Joe and Tom and Pete and the rest sitting around politely in Sunday evening white shirts and ties, and a dozen or so dude girls lounging about, rapt, happy only to be in that elect circle. There would be little or no conversation; it was enough for the girls only to be there, while the phonograph squeaked "I want to be happy, but I can't be happy till I make you happy, too," and the young gods of the corral yawned politely behind their hands.

No more Sunday evening poker, Red reflected bitterly. No more nothing. Just sitting up with

those girls until midnight or later, and then a minute or so after they had got to sleep an explosion of the alarm clock that hung by a string to the head of the corral boss's bed, and Tom's voice, heavy and helpless:

"Roll out, fellows! Four o'clock!"

Struggling into boots, stiff with mud and damp inside; grouchy silence, interspersed with yawns; out into the black dark and into the barn for the night horses.

"Whoa, Jim! What the devil's the matter with you? Stand still, can't you?"

And then out of the darkness some girlish voice, sweet and excited:

"Hello, everybody. Here I am!"

And Tom's muttered, "Good night!"

Then the movement out, and the slow coming of the dawn; the bunching of the horses, the pungent scent of the sage, moist with dew. The girl herself, no longer only a voice, but a slim young goddess flushed with the morning. Lovely! They were all lovely.

Red sighed again. He chained Bill in his corner outside the bunk house, under the apple tree, and glanced through a window into the sitting room.

The new girl was there. She was back in a corner, staring with interested eyes at the room and its

contents. Tom, the corral boss, was near her, placidly rubbing at a pair of spurs.

"Are you using the Association saddle for bucking this year?" she was asking.

And Tom looked at her patronizingly.

"What do you know about Association saddles?" he inquired. "Read it somewhere, eh?"

Outside, Red chuckled to himself.

Staring at her, he rammed his hands into the pockets of his old leather coat, and the Prairie Lily, roused from sleep, promptly bit him. He accepted this treatment stoically, and stood sucking his thumb and looking in for some little time thereafter. Later on he entered the bunk house, and if his entrance caused a small flutter among the girls there, he was supremely unconscious of it. He stalked across to the door of his bedroom and was only halted by Tom's voice.

"Say, Red, the Old Man wants to see you."

"What about?"

"He's going to give you the dairy herd."

"What?" yelled Red, spinning around. "Me?"

"Well, Larsen is tired of wet-nursing calves, and seeing how lucky you are with pets, the Old Man thought——"

But the joke died on Tom's face when Red looked at him.

The girls, however, were convulsed with laughter,

as those who have seen a god hilarious may be. Only the new girl was not smiling. She was eying Red intently from her corner.

Red went out again, slamming the door behind him, and after him went little feminine titters of mirth, and the phonograph again.

"You've been cheating on me," it bellowed, in a heavy bass voice.

The Old Man was sitting at his desk in the office, a pen in his hand and his old hat drawn well down on his head. He was a fine buccaneering sort of figure as he sat there, his desk scarred with the marks of the spurs he so often forgot to take off, his collection of guns on the wall behind him, and before him two letters which he was alternately studying.

"Come in, Red," he said, and with an effort detached himself from the papers before him. "Red, what are you planning to do with that bear of yours?"

"Do with him?"

"Well, he's getting to be a pretty expensive proposition. Mind you, I don't object to him personally; as bears go, he's a good bear. And he's local color. I understand that. But he's been in the storeroom again and eaten about ten pounds of sugar."

"Then why the hell don't they lock the store-room?" Red demanded, aggrieved.

"He went in through a window, as it happens. I'm sorry, Red, but if Bill becomes a nuisance——" He glanced at one of the letters before him. "Here's why I sent for you. The people who are pushing the new park in Montana want to send an exhibit to Chicago, and they need a bear. They'll pay one hundred dollars for it."

"Sorry," Red said stiffly. "Bill's not for sale."

"Well, I can't force you to sell him," the Old Man said, rather grimly; "but he's got to be an asset and not a liability to this ranch from now on. Get that, Red. Just one more complaint about him and out he goes."

But it was typical of the Old Man that, having thus cleared the air, he went on to other matters. He picked up the second letter and glanced at it.

"You will be glad to know," he said, "that we are getting a real horseman here tomorrow. At least so his letter says. He asks for a decent horse—'mount,' he calls it—and says he would prefer one of the hunter type. He is accustomed to cross-country riding, and wants one that can take the fences."

"Jump the wire?" asked Red in bewilderment.

"Of course he may not know it is wire," said the Old Man. "He probably thinks that we have a

hundred miles of paling fence on this ranch, or maybe privet hedge. You can't tell. The point is, you'd better meet him tomorrow and bring him out. And you can break it to him gently that jumping barbed wire is only done unintentionally, and that our hunters have run themselves to death after jack rabbits and are somewhere else getting rested."

Red grinned, for the first time during the interview.

"We've got a jumper or two up in the corral, sir," he said; but the Old Man shook his head.

"I don't propose paying hospital bills to entertain you fellows," he said grimly. "Put him on Cold Molasses first and see if he can sit a horse. And," he added, "you might just remind him that we allow no wet goods on the place. If I size up this person properly he will be carrying some extra baggage."

Red went out, and as he went his grin faded. He got Bill's evening bottle of milk at the kitchen, and sitting down on his heel in the dew-soaked grass scratched the big cub's ears as he neatly drew the cork with his teeth and drank the milk.

"Now listen, you Bill," he said. "You got to be a good bear from now on. You get that? If you don't you'll be behind the bars before long, and instead of fish, folks'll be throwing you peanuts."

He sat there for some time. He heard the new

girl come out of the bunk house, and Tom insisting on taking her back to her cabin.

"But you really don't need to. It's only a step."

"I sure do need to. That crazy bear of Red's may be loose, for one thing."

"He's perfectly tame, isn't he?"

"So Red says. But he sure is fond of sweet things. The minute he lays eyes on you——"

"Damned fool," muttered Red, in his corner.

He waited long enough to ascertain that she had not loitered over her good night to Tom, and then went into the bunk house and through the sitting room to bed.

He deposited the Prairie Lily, now fast asleep and too languid to open more than one eye, in the old boot, which was the nearest thing she had to a burrow, and taking off his shoes, sat down on the side of his bed and fell into deep thought.

When Tom came in he had quite forgotten his recent rancor against him.

"What d'you know, Tom!" he said. "There's a dude coming tomorrow who's written the Old Man to get him a hunter."

"Game season's mostly closed. But you might take him out and get another bear cub."

"A horse," Red explained. "One that'll jump fences."

"Hell!" said Tom, yawning. "What we want around here is a horse that won't."

From the moment Mr. George H. Tufts issued from the Pullman and stood amid a pile of new and shiny luggage, marked G. H. T. in large letters, Red disliked him. He disliked his blond and shiny hair; he disliked the stick hung over his left arm; he disliked the gray Mocha gloves he carried and the patronizing glance he cast over the station, the town and the great blue mountains beyond. And he was shocked and scandalized by Mr. Tufts' farewell to a girl he had clearly met on the train and who was going on.

"Well, toodle-oo, old thing," said the girl, from the platform, and held out her hand. "Maybe we'll meet agsin sometime."

"From now on," said Mr. Tufts, bowing, "I shall spend my time on Pullman cars hoping."

And with that he bent over and kissed her hand! Red's manhood was outraged. A slow color rose from his black-and-white-checked flannel shirt and outshone the brilliance of his silk neckerchief.

"Good-by, Bill Hart!" called the girl to Red, but he pretended not to hear her; and Mr. Tufts stood like the fool he looked and threw her a kiss from the platform. Ike Jenkins, the station agent, nudged Red.

"Rope and tie that, Red!" he said. "You sure get some queer birds, don't you?"

Mr. Tufts gradually returned to his surroundings and found Red at his elbow.

"Well, my man," he said, "here's my stuff. Where's the motor?"

That finished Red. As a matter of fact, the Old Man's comfortable car was waiting around the corner, but Mr. Tufts could not know that. So Red hastily invented something wrong with the steering gear.

"Well," demanded Mr. Tufts, "what am I to do? Stay in this infernal hole all night?"

"I can take you out in the truck," said Red gently. "It's kinda full up, but I guess we can manage it. You pile your duffel into it—there it is—and I'll be back in a minute."

He left Mr. Tufts staring angrily after him and disappeared around the corner. Jerry, the truck driver, was there, and Red hastily made a trade with him. Then, going to the car itself, he held brief speech with the two dude women inside it. One of them held a parrot in a cage.

"Jerry's going to take you round by the garage, ladies," he said. "It won't be long."

"But where's that nice Mr. Tufts?"

"He's going with me in the truck," Red replied

firmly. "I'll take that bird, Mrs. Rogers. He's in your way there."

Before she could protest he had swung the cage out of her lap and was gone. She called wildly after him, and the bird said "I'm passing" in a deep and solemn voice, but Red paid no attention to either the woman or the bird. Rounding the corner of the station again, he found Mr. Tufts sitting on his folded traveling rug in the seat of the truck, and held up the cage to him.

"Lady says to take good care of him," he said casually. "He's liable to get seasick if he bumps."

"Put the damned thing in the back then," said Mr. Tufts, in an unpleasant tone.

"Liable to bounce around and break his neck," said Red, still holding up the cage.

Mr. Tufts put his gloves in his pocket and his stick between his legs and gingerly took the cage. Thus settled on his lap, it practically eclipsed him, and the bird eyed him wickedly, said "Grand slam," with its head on one side, and bit one of his fingers suddenly and intensely.

"Hell's bells!" yelled Mr. Tufts. "The thing's savage!"

"Maybe that's his way of kissing your hand," said Red. Mr. Tufts glanced at him, but Red only went around to the rear of the truck and examined its

contents, which consisted mostly of trunks and rolls of barbed wire.

There was little love lost between them from that moment, however, and as they went on it grew less and less.

The road was vile, to begin with, and grew worse. And Red drove the truck, as Tufts said later to a group of guests on the lawn, rather like a fire engine going to a fire. There was no bump they didn't hit. And when Mr. Tufts dared to look away from the parrot he could see that the barbed wire had got loose and was playing the deuce with his luggage. Moreover, that there was a sort of set half grin on Red's otherwise imperturbable face that had no right to be there. By gad, the fellow was doing it on purpose! He was one of these smart Westerners, trying to show the East where it got off. Well, he could do a little of that sort of thing himself.

"You know," he said, "I can stand this as well as your springs can. Probably better."

"Stand what?" said Red, turning on him a pair of bland blue eyes.

"Driving a truck as if it was a bronc," said Mr. Tufts, who had been reading Western literature and believed that every horse west of the Mississippi was a bronc. "By the way, I've been seeing some of this stuff you fellows are putting over at the rodeos in

the East. It's a good line, but it's bunk. You can't throw a fellow out of these Western saddles."

"That so?" inquired Red with interest.

"Of course not. Look at the cantle! Look at the horn, or whatever you call the thing in front! He'd have to be pulled out like a tooth. What I'd like to see is one of you Westerners on an English saddle. That takes riding."

"So I've heard," said Red. "They look kinda thin and slippery."

"Have to use a knee grip," observed Mr. Tufts more affably. "And, of course, it's a matter of balance."

"I suppose the trouble with them," said Red, who trained the Old Man's polo ponies to the English saddle, "is that there's nothing to hold on to if you get into trouble."

"Exactly," corroborated Mr. Tufts, and would have enlarged on the matter, but at that moment, coming down a hill, they struck a terrific hump. The barbed wire immediately leaped at his back with violence and struck him a terrific blow between the shoulder blades.

"Suffering cats!" yelled Mr. Tufts, when he could yell. "Was that a trunk?"

"Only the wire," said Red. "Hurt you any?"

"It's probably torn my coat."

Red examined the rear of Mr. Tufts' coat while the truck careened madly on.

"Only a snag or two," he said. "But they carry some swell clothes at the store in town. If you go in there and say I sent you——"

"Thanks," grunted Mr. Tufts stiffly. "I don't get my clothes that way."

The rest of the ride was not conversational, save for the parrot, which took to shouting "You've revoked" over and over in a slightly excited manner. Just once Red made an effort and inquired if Tufts had ever been to a dude ranch before.

"No," said Mr. Tufts coldly; "and I don't think I ever shall be again."

At the main house the Old Man was waiting. He scanned Mr. Tufts from under his beetling eyebrows with interest as he took the parrot's cage.

"How'd your parrot stand the trip?" he inquired genially.

"It's not my parrot," snapped Mr. Tufts.

"I see. Well, I hope Red took good care of you on the way out."

"He took better care of a roll of barbed wire he brought along."

"Well, wire's a mighty important thing around here," said the Old Man, and eyed Mr. Tufts again, this time rather closely.

"And dudes are not?"

"I wouldn't go so far as that. But, you see, we have to have the wire."

Mr. Tufts had had every intention of taking ten grains of aspirin and going to bed, but on his way to his cabin he spied the new girl and suddenly changed his mind. Instead, he put on his English breeches and hoots, tied a new tie with particular care and sauntered out again. He did not, however, see the new girl again, but spent the evening on the lawn, watching various groups of riders starting out for a twilight canter over the meadows, and telling the Old Man about improving his stock by bringing in a Thoroughbred stallion, while from some place unknown came the sound of a phonograph playing "I've Got the Blues," and occasional bursts of young and cheerful laughter.

He went to bed that night in his one-room cabin, leaving the door open for coolness. And before he went he poured himself a small drink out of a bottle, to offset the effects of the aspirin. He was very tired, and the moonlight poured in through the open door and bothered him, but finally he dozed off.

In the middle of the night he was awakened suddenly by the sound of one of his monogrammed hairbrushes falling to the floor. He sat up, not yet quite certain where he was, but he oriented himself almost immediately, and it was then he saw that

somebody was in his room. A heavy figure, rather short, was standing outlined between him and the light outside, and it had what appeared to be his precious bottle uplifted in his hand.

He was not a brave man, but that bottle had been brought across the continent and was one of a carefully selected and packed dozen. So Mr. Tufts leaped from his bed and grappled with the intruder. And the intruder was hairy and grunted horribly, and before it had slid out at the cabin door it had swatted Mr. Tufts very violently on the side of the head.

Mr. Tufts reeled around until he had found a chair and dropped into it.

"A bear!" he kept muttering to himself. "It was a bear!"

It was not for some time that he recovered sufficiently to notice a pungent and familiar odor in the cabin. That roused him, and he lighted a match and investigated. His precious bottle was gone, but a part of its contents was trickling along the floor.

Bill the Bear was in a strange mood the next morning, but at that he had very little on the corral.

Now the usual method of the corral with a new dude is somewhat arbitrary. He goes up to the corral boss and meekly asks for a horse; Tom looks him over, yells to the saddle boss, who appraises him

for size of saddle, and then rope in hand rides into the corral. It is the opinion of some people that once inside the inclosure he simply shuts his eyes and throws his rope, and that that horse on which the noose settles is brought out; but be that as it may, that particular horse is thereafter assigned to that particular individual, and barring accidents, so remains.

But this morning was different. Mr. Tufts intended to choose his horse, and said so. He stood for some time outside the corral, and finally picked on a tall bay.

"Bring him out," he commanded calmly. "I want to see him in action."

"You mean that's the horse you want?"

"I didn't say that. Bring him out and let's see what he can do."

"We're not showing samples," said Tom.

"And I'm not riding any animal you choose to put me on," said Mr. Tufts, with equal brevity. "I'll pick my horse or I'll know why not."

Thus it happened that the line-up of morning riders, meekly awaiting their animals, was treated to the edifying spectacle of Red, the crack rider of the outfit, walking, trotting and cantering a succession of horses before a supercilious youngish gentleman who made adverse and most unpleasant comments on them, their action and their lineage.

And that gentleman ended up by saying loudly, "Well, now we've seen your pack animals, where do you keep your saddle outfit?"

"I'll tell you," said Red, above the titter that rose; "most of them are turned out to pasture so no fool Easterner can get ahold of them and ride the guts out of them."

In the silence that followed this, Mr. Tufts gazed into the barn.

"What have you got in there?" he inquired. But as Red made no reply, he sauntered into that holy of holies, where the Old Man's Palamina occupied a box stall, where Loco Lizzie, who had eaten loco weed and was plumb crazy, stood ready to kick, bite and squeal at any provocation and where dudes were about as welcome as the foot-and-mouth disease.

Red freed the last rejected animal and it shot back to the corral. And a minute later the new girl spoke to him.

"Mr. Tufts is in the stall with Loco Lizzie, Red," she said. "Do you think it's safe?"

"Probably not. But who cares?" said Red bitterly.

Tufts escaped unscathed, however, and the entire outfit sighed with disappointment when he emerged. He had selected the Old Man's Palamina, as a matter of fact, and complained bitterly when he was refused.

After a time he chose the tall bay he had first looked at, and—"Tom," Red called, "put down Sleeping Sickness for Mr. Tufts."

"That the horse he wants?"

"So he says."

"Sleeping Sickness?" inquired Mr. Tufts. "What's wrong with him. Don't he go?"

"He'll go all right."

"Does he buck?"

"Never heard of it."

But there was suspicion in Mr. Tufts' eyes as he prepared to mount.

"If you're thinking of putting anything over on me, you'd better think again."

"What d'you mean—putting something over?" Red demanded. "I'll tell you, Mr. Tufts," he added confidentially, "that's a good horse. I knew you were a horseman when you picked him. But about those spurs now, if you're in kinda deepish water and want to get him across——"

Mr. Tufts grinned and cut him off.

"Don't you worry about me," he said. "I was riding a real horse when you were rocking a hobby. I'll get him over all right."

He started off.

The new girl, whose name turned out to be Nancy—there were no surnames in use at the corral—was near Red when he turned around.

"What's the matter with that horse?" she demanded.

"That horse? Why, Sleeping Sickness is a good horse," he said aggrievedly. "Look at him going now! Action's the word for it."

"You winked at Tom! I saw you."

"Can't a fellow get a bit of dust in his eye without you calling him for it?" His manner was innocence itself, but the girl still watched him, in her curiously direct manner.

"What about the water?"

"Well, I tried to tell him. The fool wouldn't listen."

"What about it?" she insisted.

Red looked at her and then glanced away. He was always a bit dazzled when she was close by.

"Well," he said uncomfortably, "you see, if he should happen to spur him while he's in water anywhere——"

"Well?"

"Well, he's plumb likely to lie down—that's all." Suddenly Nancy laughed. She threw back her head and laughed, cheerfully, delightfully. And Red joined her, rather sheepishly.

"In a ditch!" she gasped.

"Or in the creek," said Red, wiping his eyes with a not too clean bandanna. "Those breeches of his, now——"

Perhaps nothing so suddenly unites two people as the sharing of a secret joke between them. And when some twenty minutes later Mr. Tufts came back to the corral, it was Nancy who caught Red's eye and was obliged to retire abruptly into the barn.

Mr. Tufts came back afoot—rather, on two extremely wet feet. In fact, not an inch of Mr. Tufts was dry. His hat was gone, his collar was a dejected string, and from the top of his boots there escaped ever and anon a thin fine spurt of water.

"Where's your horse?" Red called to him.

"I don't know and I don't give a damn."

He limped past the barn and down to his cabin, into which he retired in high dudgeon. There, by inserting a foot between the iron bars of his camp bed, he was able to draw off his boots, and finally to peel off his other garments. But it galled him extremely that he was obliged to open an entirely new bottle in order to take his aspirin. He never took aspirin without something to offset what he had heard were its depressant qualities.

That afternoon he made a complaint to the Old Man.

"Well," said the Old Man, "I'm sorry you've had trouble, but if you will choose your own horse——"

"Trouble! Malicious mischief, that's what it was."

But later on in the complaint the Old Man pricked up his ears.

"A bear!" he said. "What sort of a bear?"

"I didn't have time to classify him. A grizzly, I'd say."

"Don't keep candy in your cabin, do you?"

"No," said Mr. Tufts shortly.

"We've got a tame cub around here, and I dare say that's what it was. You needn't worry about Bill. He's perfectly gentle."

"Gentle!" snarled Mr. Tufts. "I'm not asking about his disposition. The thieving rascal! If he comes in again——"

"Oh! He took something, did he?"

Mr. Tufts hesitated. The ranch circular had clearly stated that no intoxicants were permitted on the property, and the Old Man's eyes were distinctly suspicious.

"No," he said slowly. "I threw him out before he got anything."

When he had gone the Old Man put on his big hat and wandered over to the bunk house. The boys were trying out broncos and half-broken horses in the breaking corral, and no one was near. The Old Man sauntered over to the apple tree and looked down at Bill.

"Get up," he said, "and let's have a look at you."

But Bill only opened one eye and groaned. The Old Man bent down over him and sniffed. There was a faint but undeniable alcoholic aura around

Bill, and his morning bottle of milk lay untouched beside him.

"You're a pretty sight," said the Old Man severely. "You're still tight, and you know it."

He jerked the bear to his feet, but Bill only tottered to the apple tree and stood leaning dizzily against it for a minute. Then he collapsed again.

"You're a drunken loafer," said the Old Man disgustedly. "He threw you out, did he? Why in blazes, when you had all that courage in you, didn't you bite hell out of him?"

As time went on, Mr. Tufts' initial unpopularity in the corral grew, and in return he gave the cowboys and wranglers a sort of contemptuous familiarity that galled them exceedingly. He was plainly scornful of their riding, too, and referred to them generally as the bronco steerers.

But he seemed unable to keep away from them. He was always at the corral, criticizing openly, or sitting on the bench by the barn door with a small twisted smile on his lips. In the evenings he invaded the sitting room and criticized their taste in phonograph records, sitting as closely as possible to Nancy and addressing most of his remarks to her.

When she swung herself lightly into the saddle and started down the road, he was always just a minute or so behind her. He would catch her by

the ford and say something to the effect that "Beautiful young ladies mustn't ride alone"; or, "Don't you want a gate opener this evening?"

And Red, watching from the corral, would follow them mentally over hill and dale, and suffer agonies of futile jealousy.

"Darned old bunch-quitter!" he would mutter, and savagely go on tightening cinches and changing stirrups.

"All set now, Mrs. Jones?"

"Well, I think it's better."

A bunch-quitter—that's what he was. Never running with the herd, off hidden in draws, the bunch-quitter was the curse of the morning wrangling. And Tufts was like that. He never joined the noisy, cheery riding parties. The girl he took was in for a long and sentimental tête-à-tête, and the girl was generally Nancy. Usually his talk, when she could shift it from herself, went to the outfit.

"Pretty crude, they are," he would say, watching her. "Don't you think so?"

"They're absolutely genuine, if that's what you mean."

"So you've fallen like the rest! You surprise me! What is it? The clothes they wear? That's plain dude stuff—local color."

"But they never wear anything else."

"No," said Mr. Tufts, grinning; "I agree with you. In fact, I doubt if they ever take 'em off."

It was the horsemanship of Mr. Tufts, however, which chiefly got on the nerves of the corral. Day after day he took out a new horse, only to bring it back with a complaint.

"Kick!" said Tom bitterly. "He could kick the salt out of a biscuit."

He changed saddles frequently also, and had to have the intricate lacings of the stirrups unloosed and their length altered, times without number. And his criticisms of all things Western were constant and bitter.

"Why the dickens do you brand your horses?" he demanded once. "Even if a fellow did see a horse here fit to take East, the brand would spoil him."

"We brand 'em so you Eastern horsemen can tell 'em apart," said Red blandly.

What could Tufts know of the bitter winters there? Of the December drive south to better grass, with the herds of the Diamond D and the Double O and all the other outfits hopelessly intermingled? And then of the spring round-up, and the cutting out and bunching of their own brand, and the long drive north and home again?

"The poor nut," Red commented to himself.

There was that day when the Old Man's Palamina,

feeling good, had done a bit of bucking with the Old Man riding it out in good style, and later on the Old Man had come back to find that somebody had put a different bridle on the horse, one with a spade bit.

"Tom!" yelled the Old Man in a fury. "Red! Joel! Who the devil changed this bridle?"

"Mr. Tufts, sir," came in a sort of joyous chorus.

"Come here, Tufts. Just what is the idea?"

"Well, if you don't know what that horse needs," began Mr. Tufts sulkily, "I——"

"It's a fancy of mine," said the Old Man loudly and distinctly, "to bridle my own horses according to my own idea. Now you take that damned thing off and fix this animal the way you found it. And be quick about it," he snapped savagely.

There was only one fly in Red's ointment that day. Nancy had not been there to see Tufts' discomfiture. She was usually around, very unobtrusive, but keenly watching. She would sit quietly on the bench and scrutinize the men as they worked. And it wasn't long before she knew most of the horses by name. She was observant too.

"That blue roan, Sally, is lame this morning," she would say quietly; or, "Leander has cast a shoe."

"She's forgotten more about horses than Tufts ever knew," was Tom's comment.

After their own fashion, the boys adopted her.

That is, they put her to work. Sometimes she operated the cut-out gate, sitting high up in the air and operating it with her foot. As the saddlers came along she let them in; the broncos and half-broken horses she kept out. And this takes an eye.

"How do you know them all?" Mr. Tufts inquired one morning, crawling up precariously beside her.

"I was raised with horses," she said absently. "And don't talk; I'm busy."

She hunted lost horses, drove out the cavy, and in the barn looked after the horses which, as the season went on, began to show the effects of the summer's work. Thus it was Nancy who attended to the cinch sores, daubing on them the dark-green gall cure, and even, when that failed, experimenting with stove polish for the same purpose.

This last was Red's idea.

"Horse of mine had a bad sore one time," he said, "and that's all I had—stove polish. Well, I figured if it made a glaze on the stove, it would do the same on a horse, and it did."

"What on earth were you doing with stove polish, Red?"

"I've got a ranch of my own on the Rosebud," he said, with a glance at Tufts, who was near by, of course. "And once a year or so I polish the stove. I'm some polisher," he added boastfully.

But later on he told her about his ranch. It wasn't much of a place, but he'd homesteaded it himself, and it was his.

"Just a shack on it now, you know," he explained carefully; "but some of these days I'm going to put a house on it and live there."

He looked at her. She was the finest and prettiest girl the Lord had ever made, he considered, and she sure did know horses. With a girl like that now, a fellow——

"Some of these days," he added, with a sigh, "if I live long enough!"

"A log house, Red?"

"There's no style about a log house. I've got that already."

"But there is, really. You can put Indian blankets on the walls and do all sorts of things to them. Curtains, you know, and all that."

"I ain't so smart with my needle as I used to be," said Red, and grinned at her. But, although his mouth smiled, his eyes were fixed on her with a sort of wistful hopelessness.

"I've got some good pasture there," he said. "I could run quite some horses if I had 'em, and maybe some steers. Not a lot. There's more money in a hundred fat beef cattle than in a big herd of range stock."

But after such a talk Red was apt to go away by

himself and call himself a variety of picturesque names. He knew well enough what would happen. One of these days she would go away again into that strange and luxurious world from which she had emerged. And she would write him a letter and at Christmas she would send him a card, and then it would all be over. Oh, he knew all right! He'd seen it happen before—only not to him, not to him.

Watching for the rural postman coming up the road in his flivver truck; allowing a decent interval, and then wandering into the store to ask if there was any mail for him; and going out again with a forced grin and a mail-order catalogue clutched in his hand. And Tom watching quietly and inventing errands to get him off the ranch for a while.

"You'd better ride over to Stevenson's, Red, and see what he wants for that chestnut mare he's talking about"; or, "There's going to be some riding at Salter's next Sunday, Red. Better take the Whirler and go over."

No! Not for him. He'd ride this thing out or drop off before the hazers grabbed him out of the saddle.

In all those weeks he had only one happy moment. That was when Mr. Tufts, learning that Nancy was wrangling one morning, rose early and

jabbed his spurs suddenly into his sulky, half-awakened animal.

With extreme suddenness an earthquake began to occur under and around that Eastern horseman, ending with a bit of volcanic action which ejected him, like a rock from a crater, straight up into the air and down again.

"Pretty much like pulling a tooth, at that," was Red's comment as he watched Mr. Tufts, so to speak, reassembling himself. And from that time on, that particular animal was known in the corral as The Dentist.

But it was Nancy who began, at this time, to watch the outfit with suspicion not entirely unjustified.

"It's a conspiracy against him," she told Red hotly. "You wouldn't care if he broke his neck."

"It doesn't have to be his neck. A rib or two would satisfy me."

It is probable that the rift between them really began about that time. Certainly Nancy began to substitute for her former casual manner to Tufts a watchful and slightly protective one. And if this deceived Mr. Tufts, it drove Red to a jealous desperation that made him occasionally sarcastic with her.

"How do you spell 'latigo,' Red?" she asked him one day. He eyed her.

"Me?" he said. "You're asking me how to spell? Why, I was grown up before I knew you didn't spell 'dog' 'd-circle-g.' Go and ask Tufts; he's educated."

"Well, he's polite, anyhow," she flashed, and left him.

The little rift grew and widened. It was to Tom now that Nancy went with her comments and suggestions; it was with Tufts she rode in the dewy evenings, or when the moon hung like a great lantern over the cleft in the mountain wall. And when the phonograph in the bunk house wailed "I Love You," there would be an unbearable pain about Red's left fifth intercostal space, in the region of his heart, which was all that he could bear.

As time went on Red began to show considerable wear and tear. His tall young body was thin and his eyes, when no one was looking, often had a desperate look in them. On Sunday afternoon, riding bucking horses to entertain the crowd, he was utterly reckless; and the Old Man, ramping around near the bucking chute, would call to the hazers to take the fool off and lock him up somewhere.

After one such experience Nancy sought him out, where he sat on his heel under the apple tree with Bill, and tried to reason with him. But he only looked up with hard, defiant young eyes.

"I'm all right," he said. "You run along and find your little playmate. Bill and I, we're fine."

The Old Man, too, took to doing a little worrying on his own account. And finally he sent for Tom.

"How about getting Red off the place for a while?" he inquired.

"I been thinkin' about that myself."

"He might take the Whirler over to Salter's. There's going to be some riding there next Sunday."

"You've seen the way he's riding. He's likely to kill something—himself or the horse."

"I suppose so," said the Old Man heavily. "Well, if you think of anything let me know. He's a good boy."

After Tom had gone, he repeated that phrase, staring absently at a photograph which hung on the wall beside his desk. This was of a largish man on a very famous race horse, and the Old Man contemplated it thoughtfully.

"He's a good boy," he repeated to the picture. "She'd be all right with him. But she's got this yellow dog of a bunch-quitter in tow, and I don't know."

After which mixed figure he sighed and rolled himself another cigarette.

There came a time when wherever Red looked

he seemed to see Nancy's small brown head and Tufts' pomatumed blond one. And at last it grew unbearable and he asked to be sent away from the ranch.

"Gimme a camping party or something," he said to Tom one day. "These dudes are making me phumb spooky."

"Sure thing, Red," said Tom, not looking at him. "Next one's yours, if you say."

So he waited for that. It meant escape, reprieve from active suffering, and he knew the mountains.

"All I do know," he considered, with the new bitterness that was in him. They had been his school and his university; he had gone out there with cow outfits when he had had to chin himself onto a horse, carrying water and chopping wood for the cook; he had nighthawked there before he was sixteen; had ridden night guard there over stampeding cattle in storms, singing to quiet them and afraid to light a cigarette for fear of starting them off; had been lost in them in the winter and hungry in them in the summer. But he knew them and he felt that they knew him. "They'll be good medicine," he said, and waited.

And at last the time came. Mrs. Rogers decided to go camping in the mountains.

"Just for a couple of days," she told the Old Man;

"to see the wild flowers and to rest at night on dear old Mother Earth."

The Old Man eyed her. She was a portly woman, the sort which always seems to be lying on a hump no matter how flat the ground.

"Well," he said, "we've got the earth, and I dare say you'll find the wild flowers. But I wouldn't count too much on the rest."

He had a conference that day with Tom, and later on Red was notified to take the party. But early that evening the Old Man, after a sort of mute consultation with the photograph on his wall, called Nancy into the office under pretense of showing her the great chest of skins there, and proceeded to sound her out with more thoroughness than tact.

"What's the matter between you and Red?"

"Red? Why, nothing at all!"

"Seemed to me lately you've been treating him as if he had something catching," he said. "He's a good boy, well broke, no vices and a steady worker."

He thought she colored, but she looked at him with the direct gaze of the man on the wall.

"It sounds all right," she said, "but I'm not buying just now."

And that was exactly as far as he got with her. When he told her Red was to take a party into the mountains and suggested she go along to help wrangle, her hesitation was barely noticeable.

"I'll go," she said, "if Red wants me. I'm not sure he will."

"Want you?" said the Old Man. "Why, the darned young fool——"

But he thought better of that.

However, the Old Man was well content. He had pulled off what he considered a neat thing, and there was a sort of managerial interest in the way he watched Red and Nancy preparing for the trip; Red whistling over pack animals and saddles and inspecting panniers, and Nancy anxiously requisitioning stores from the storehouse; and a slight twinkle when he surveyed Mr. Tufts, gloomily watching from the bench in front of the barn, as the damned perhaps may look toward Paradise. So far did this carry him that he stopped before Mr. Tufts one morning and addressed him genially.

"How's your parrot getting along?" he inquired.

"I told you before it wasn't my parrot."

"That so? I'd forgotten. Had any more visits from Bill?"

Mr. Tufts looked up at him with an angry gleam in his eye.

"I'll say I have," he said shortly. "He's at my door every night trying to claw the lock off. He can slip his collar, and that cowboy he belongs to knows it."

"Well, don't leave anything indigestible around,"

observed the Old Man. "He was kind of upset in his stomach after that last time he got in."

He wandered off, leaving Mr. Tufts in a state of speechless fury.

It was that evening that Mr. Tufts returned from his evening ride and rode gingerly toward the corral. He was slightly stiff in one leg, but there was the light of discovery in his eye and a plan for revenge in his mind.

Red was on picket duty and Mr. Tufts addressed him with an unwonted conciliation of tone.

"Wish you'd try this horse out, Red," he said. "Either he's gone lame or he's pretending. I don't know which."

Red eyed him suspiciously, but there was no guile in Mr. Tufts' bland face and no limp for the moment in Mr. Tufts' gait.

"All right," he said shortly, and swung into the saddle. But before he had fairly landed, Mr. Tufts with an apparently casual gesture, took off his hat and waved it ever so slightly. Immediately the animal broke in two.

"Stay in the buggy, Red!" Tom yelled cheerfully as the animal bucked madly down the road. "Ride him, cowboy!"

But there was no riding that horse for Red, half mounted as he was. And as he picked himself up and went morosely back to the corral, he saw Nancy

waiting for him with her small chin high in the air.

"So that's the sort of horse you're expecting Mr. Tufts to ride!" she said coldly.

"Oh, damn Mr. Tufts!" he replied gloomily, and went past her without further speech.

Nevertheless, with the optimism of youth, Red felt that the camping trip would clear matters between them. Not that he hoped for much. All he asked was to have her to himself for a little while; to sit with her perhaps by the dying camp fire after the women had gone to their tents, to talk a bit, or perhaps not at all, while the pines rose about them like the columns of some great cathedral and the horses grazed and rested in the open upland parks.

But as it turned out he was not to have even this. On the evening before the start Mrs. Rogers ambled up to the saddle house and called in to him.

"Oh, Red," she said, wheezing slightly, "I hope you don't mind. That nice Mr. Tufts wants to come along, and so I've asked him."

There was straight murder in Red's heart that night. Long after the lights in the sitting room at the bunk house were out and the weary phonograph was still, he was sitting among his pack saddles in the saddle house, lost in an apathy of despair. The

ignominy of his fall was mixed up in it, and Nancy's new suspicion of him.

"He scared that horse," he said, over and over. "I saw him do it, the dirty skunk!"

Toward daylight he got up stiffly, and wandering down to the apple tree found that Bill was missing. A fugitive hope that Bill would get into Mr. Tufts' cabin and hug him to death passed through his mind, and although it passed, it left something behind it.

He stood for a moment, thoughtfully holding Bill's vacated collar in his hands. Then, still thoughtful, he moved cautiously to the door of the Old Man's office and softly tried the door.

As to just what happened on that camping trip, opinions are divided. Apparently nothing much occurred on the way up. Red rode grimly at the head of the line, picking the trail, while Nancy, in the rear, pushed on the pack ponies. And in the center of the line Mr. Tufts rode along unhappily amid fields of shooting stars and wild roses, larkspurs and forget-me-nots, and was the slave of the women who surrounded him. Little streams crossed the trail, where the horses buried their noses deep and drank and drank. And at every stream some fool woman or other wanted her tin cup filled, and Red never heard the call.

"Oh, Mr. Tufts, would you mind getting me a drink?"

And Tufts would crawl off his horse, muttering, and fill her cup for her. With aching shoulders, he tightened cinches, and even now and then was compelled to dismount and gather wild flowers.

"Oh, there's some wild hyacinth! Mr. Tufts, do get it for me. I want it for my wild-flower book."

He felt trapped, ensnared. His attempts to fall back with Nancy were foiled by the pack horses, pushing ahead of her along the trail. And still they climbed. His body ached, every inch of it. His boots felt tight and his neck stiff. Something was wrong with his face too; it began to feel swollen and strange. All he wanted was to get into camp and stretch out under a tree and not move until Red had straightened from the sheet-iron stove and called, "Come and get it!"

"Mr. Tufts, I think my saddle is slipping."

"Oh, go to the devil!" would mutter Mr. Tufts miserably, and crawl off his horse once more.

At six o'clock that evening the party rode into the camp, and Mr. Tufts fell off his horse and staggered to a bed of pine needles under a tree. He had no more than stretched out when Red yelled at him.

"Take that saddle off your horse, Tufts. What do you think you're doing?"

"Take it off yourself," said Mr. Tufts, unpleas-

antly. "What do you think we brought you for?"

Red walked over to him.

"Better get up, Mr. Tufts," he said quietly. "I've got the supper to cook and the tents to put up. Your horse is your job."

"Then I'll let the saddle stay on," said Mr. Tufts, yawning luxuriously, and turning over prepared to fall into sweet and dreamless slumber. Red was white with anger as he turned around and left him. After a time he unsaddled the weary animal and turned him out to graze, but there was a look of suppressed fury in his face that evening as he hammered in tent pegs and chopped wood for cooking fire. Only once, however, did he refer to Tufts, and that was when Nancy, straightening from paring potatoes, looked with a puckered brow at the sleeping horseman.

"Doesn't his face look swollen to you, Red?" she inquired.

"I hope he swells up and bursts," said Red savagely, and Nancy became ominously quiet.

The evening, however, was peaceful enough. Red told bear stories of a most fearful kind around the camp fire, so that everyone was covered with goose flesh, and Mrs. Rogers declared that you could scratch a match on her most anywhere. Tufts had settled himself on the ground at Nancy's feet and now and then cast up at her a sentimental glance,

slightly marred by the fact that his eyes were by that time swollen almost shut. Now and then Red's eyes rested on him with a sort of gloomy satisfaction, although Nancy's solicitude made him fairly gnash his teeth.

"Really," she said once, "I think you ought to do something for that sunburn, Mr. Tufts."

" 'Sall right," said Mr. Tufts, through thickened lips. "Just so long as you feel sorry for me, little girl, 'sall right."

"Maybe it's sunburn; maybe it isn't," said Red ominously, from across the fire.

"What the devil do you think it is?" Mr. Tufts demanded, lifting himself on his elbow and glaring across. "Dropsy?"

Red grinned back at him.

"Well," he drawled, "some folks just naturally swell up in these mountains. We brought a little thin fellow up once and by the time we struck nine thousand feet he was ridin' two horses and sleepin' in two tents. At ten thousand——"

But Nancy threw him a cold glance and got up, and the rest of the women followed suit.

That was at nine o'clock. It was about 9:10, therefore, when Mr. Tufts, bending over the swollen creek to lave his swollen face, heard a sound behind him and looked over his shoulder. There was an enormous bear standing just over him, and as he

looked it gave a hideous grunt and spread out its dreadful arms.

Mr. Tufts did not hesitate. He made one leap into the stream, was caught by the current and immediately swept from view.

It was the next evening that the Old Man sent for Tom, and let him stand inside the doorway until he had rolled a cigarette thoughtfully.

"You talked to Tufts, Tom?"

"Some. He's got a bad case of poison ivy. Had to be led down, I understand. Couldn't see out of his eyes."

The Old Man grunted.

"What's this about a bear?"

"He claims one attacked him and threw him into the creek."

"That's not all, is it?"

Tom coughed.

"What I think," he said carefully, "is that he knocked his head on a rock and dreamed the rest of it."

"What is the rest of it?"

Tom avoided the Old Man's eye.

"Well, according to Tufts," he said, "this bear, it shoved him into the creek, and then ran along the bank and pulled him out, about a half mile

below. A little more and he'd have gone over the falls."

"Humph!" said the Old Man. "Kind-hearted son of a gun, wasn't it?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom.

"Chased him down the creek and pulled him out, eh?" repeated the Old Man thoughtfully. "Regular life-saving type of bear! Well, one lives and learns."

"Yes, sir," said Tom, noncommittally.

After Tom had gone the Old Man got up and went over to the chest where he kept some of his hunting trophies and skins. He leaned over and searched it with an exploratory hand. After that he went through rather a curious proceeding. He gathered together his cigarette papers, his tobacco and matches and carefully fitted a cushion into a chair in a corner. Then he extinguished the light and settled himself in the chair, after the manner of a man who awaited something.

Nor had he long to wait. At 10:30 o'clock the door of the office was opened with extreme stealth, and a figure carrying a large damp bundle slid inside. It stood there, seeming to sniff the atmosphere, which smelled of very recent hand-rolled cigarettes, and to be ready to whirl and depart at any suspicious sound. But the room was dark and quiet. It came farther inside and closed the door.

"Just put it down there, Red," said the Old Man,

out of the darkness. "It'd better be hung out tomorrow to dry. Never put a good skin away damp."

The figure tottered and then straightened itself.

"No, sir," said Red, in a shaken voice.

"And now you're here, Red," went on the Old Man, "I've concluded that by and large we're having too many bears around here. One bear may be local color, but when they attack our guests and imperil their lives, it's a different matter."

"I can pull out all right, if that's what you mean."

"You?" said the Old Man urbanely. "I was speaking about bears, Red. What have you got to do with it? To be exact, I was speaking about Bill."

So that was it! The Old Man was going to take it out on Bill! Red felt a sharp tightening of the throat.

"What about Bill?" he said hoarsely. "If he's taken anything I'll replace it."

"Unfortunately, in this case you can't, Red. He got at Mrs. Rogers' parrot, I believe, and stripped most of the feathers off."

"He was only playing," said Red pleadingly. "Why, Bill, he wouldn't hurt a fly! Of course, if the fool bird can't take a joke——"

"That's it exactly," said the Old Man. "You see, Red, we appear to have a lot of bears around here that seem to think it's always the first of April, and something's got to be done about it. What I aim

to do is to teach them that life is real, life is earnest. I forget the rest, but you know what I mean."

"Yes, sir," said Red, dumbly.

Half an hour later Red staggered out of the office and tried to collect a world which had gone to pieces about him, and which for the future would contain, for him, no Bill and no Nancy.

Bill was to go and Nancy was already lost to him. She had, indeed, not spoken to him since a brief interchange on the way down the trail that morning. She had wrangled and helped pack in silence, and at last her attitude had goaded him into speech.

"Seems to me you've got a suspicious nature," he had said. "Just because the fool can't see and thinks there's a bear and jumps into the creek——"

"How do you know he jumped into the creek?"

"There you go! You'll be saying next I pushed him into the creek."

"I think you did," Nancy had said briefly; and Red, rankling under such injustice, had worked on in silence.

So that night Red went out into a cold and unloving world. Nancy, and now Bill! He found a grain of comfort when, the wind turning cold, the Prairie Lily got out of her boot and crawled under his blankets; but toward morning he rolled on her and she bit him savagely. He flung her out on the floor,

and then remorsefully got up and felt around for her.

"Come on, Lil," he muttered. "You and I, we've got to stick together. I'm sorry, old girl."

But she crawled back sulkily into the boot. And at that moment, at his own valuation, Red wouldn't have brought three cents a pound on the hoof.

The next day was very bad indeed. Nancy brought in her horse and unsaddled it herself, ignoring Red's soft-voiced offer of assistance.

"Can't I do that for you?"

"No, thanks," she said, with an air of finality.

And in the evening, driving the cavvy out into the lease, it was Joe who went along, and not Nancy. He missed her with a terrible ache; over the thunder of hoofs and the flying dust her voice, clear and girlish—"Hi, hi-ee, hi-ee!" Rounding up the stragglers, turning the bunch-quitters, and so on and on until the lease was reached and the headlong stampede to the grass ended. Nobody to show him the purple in the mountains as the sun went down, or to see an island in the clouds, and even a castle on it.

"Don't you see it, Red? Battlements and everything?"

"Looks like the grand stand at the state fair to me!"

Or, "How high's Old Baldy, Red?"

"Eight thousand feet."

"You said six thousand yesterday."

"So it was. That peak's sure growing. It was a hole in the ground when I first came here."

All over. No more would her eyes survey the horses with a quick and practical glance, and pick out the lame, the vicious and the sick.

"That bay colt's got a touch of colic, Red. Watch the way he rolls." Or, "Tom certainly got stuck with that Quarter Circle H mare. She's blind in one eye."

All over!

He made one more effort to see Nancy that night; but if she was in her cabin, she did not answer his knock, and by midnight he had made up his mind. He would leave the ranch and forget that there were women in the world. He and Bill and the Prairie Lily—it was the hell of a family, but it was all he had. Oh, well—

He spent the early part of the night assembling his few belongings in the saddle house; his bed roll, his silver-inlaid bridle, his Mexican horsehair lariat, which on state occasions replaced his everyday rope; a leather vest, made by an Indian squaw and decorated with the words Oolong Tea down the front in beads, as the squaw had copied it from a tin can; the chaps he had won for riding Hard-Hearted Hannah at the state fair, and a few other trinkets dear to the cowboy heart.

It was well after midnight when he had finished. He straightened up, and lighting a cigarette stood for a moment in the doorway of the saddle house, gazing out over the sleeping ranch, taking an inarticulate farewell of it, and of the horses, grazing or resting in the high upper meadow. His throat tightened.

He wandered into the barn and moved quietly among the night horses there to his own big gray.

"All right, boy. It's only me."

He went to the bin and filled a measure with oats. He was in the act of carrying it across, when a series of strange sounds caught his ear and held him frozen for a moment; yells and distant oaths, and what sounded like the smashing of furniture were coming from one of the cabins.

Red dropped the measure on the barn floor and ran.

Mr. Tufts had put in a bad day. Mostly he lay in bed, watching his door uneasily for Mrs. Rogers, who kept running in at unseemly moments with a baking-soda compress. Lying on his back, his face was swollen to a puffy mass, like a rosy plateau from which arose the lambent volcano which had at one time been his nose. And his eyes were all but closed.

He had steadfastly refused to admit Nancy, and except for Mrs. Rogers, he remained in conceal-

ment. Now and then he dozed, but mostly he lay awake and itched and burned and fumed. For Mrs. Rogers that evening had brought him some information.

"Really," she said, "if it was a practical joke something ought to be done about it."

"What was a practical joke?"

"If it wasn't a bear at all, but somebody pretending to be one."

"But I saw it," he said. "The brute attacked me and threw me into the water."

"Exactly," she nodded. "And then those coral boys laugh at everything. The way they've acted about my poor parrot is simply heartless."

But the incident took his mind, as one may say, from poison ivy to bears, and he lay there and thought for some time. There could be no doubt that that bear in the mountains had pulled him out of the creek, whatever doubt there might be as to its pushing him in. There had, moreover, been a strange look in Nancy's face when he had told her about it. And that afternoon, as he was dozing, he had overheard an inquiry outside his window.

"Well, how's little Goldilocks today? Any more bears?"

And this had been followed by a burst of ribald laughter, quickly suppressed. The truth dawned on him like thunder.

Helpless fury and plans for revenge kept him awake until late that night. Once he got up and took a small drink, to see if it would make him sleep. And shortly after, he heard Bill sniffing around the doorway, and even working at the latch with his paw.

"Get away from there!" Mr. Tufts said bitterly, through the compress. "Get away or I'll knock your head off!"

And Bill apparently departed.

At something after midnight, however, he was roused again. Something had come in through his window and landed heavily on his floor. In so doing it had upset the bottle on his table, and a spirituous but pleasant odor began to diffuse itself through the cabin, followed by the sound of lapping. Cold fury possessed Mr. Tufts and added itself to his former indignation, but remembering his former experience with Bill he lay still.

Once the bear strangled and he hoped malevolently that he would choke to death. But the true possibilities of the situation did not present themselves until the bear, having finished the liquor, launched himself once more at the open window and fell short of it.

"Tight, you little devil, aren't you?" muttered Mr. Tufts. "Well, stay tight and be damned to you!"

Bill was tight. He appeared to be leaning up against the foot of Mr. Tufts' bed and swaying slightly. Raising his head cautiously, Mr. Tufts tried to see him, but owing to the swelling his vision was imperfect. He did notice that Bill seemed to have grown somewhat in the last few days, but that was all. And after two or three further futile attempts to make the high window, the bear collapsed on the floor, moaning slightly. After a time he slept.

It was about that time that Mr. Tufts had his great idea. Leaning cautiously out of the bed, he prodded Bill's foot as it lay within reach. No reaction following, he slid cautiously out of bed and put on his dressing gown and slippers. The bear moved a little then and tried to sit up, but his head was too heavy; it swayed tipsily from side to side and then fell again. He slept once more.

Mr. Tufts opened his door and looked out. The Old Man's reading light was out and his cabin dark. And Mr. Tufts, making a reconnoitering excursion, heard that gradual crescendo of snores, rising to an explosion, bursting, and then followed by a period of deathlike silence, which marked the Old Man asleep.

Very, very carefully Mr. Tufts opened the Old Man's door and left it so. Then he went back to Bill.

At the first outbreak Red had flung aside his cigarette and started for the noise on a dead run. Doors were opening cautiously here and there. And Mrs. Rogers' parrot, sewed into a piece of flannel to cover his nakedness, was yelling "Passing, passing!" in a hysterical voice from her front porch.

As he reached the Old Man's cabin the door opened suddenly and the Old Man himself leaped out into the roadway. He was practically in the condition of the parrot, minus the flannel, and his language was singularly unrestrained.

"Suffering snakes!" cried Red. "What's the matter, sir?"

"Matter!" roared the Old Man. "That — cub of yours has gone crazy, that's all!"

"Bill?"

"Yes, Bill!" shouted the Old Man. "Get me a blanket from one of these cabins and keep that door shut there until I get my gun."

"You're not going to shoot Bill?"

"I'm going to do my damndest," said the Old Man firmly, and started on a run for the main house.

Red felt very tired and a little sick. Inside the cabin he could hear Bill padding about, less frenzied now, but every now and then launching an attack at the door. And out of the slowly growing crowd he saw Nancy come and heard her question as from a great distance.

"It's all right," he said drearily. "Old Man's going to shoot Bill—that's all." If she made a motion to put her hand on his shoulder, he did not notice it. "He was a good bear," he said dully. "He must of eat loco weed or something."

He got up when he heard the Old Man returning, and he was in the barn with his hands over his ears when the shot was fired. Nancy, hunting for him, did not think to look for him there; and so it happened that he pulled out alone somewhere toward dawn, with the horsehair larist on his saddle horn and the vest with Oolong Tea down the front greeting the morning with a sort of factitious gayety.

Having deposited an overgrown and reluctant but enfeebled Bill inside the Old Man's cabin, Mr. Tufts had retreated to his own with a certain sense of satisfaction. The Old Man's cabin was sacred ground.

"I turn over my whole ranch to my guests," he was wont to say, "but my cabin's mine, by gadd! And when I want company I'll ask for it."

So Mr. Tufts crawled back into bed and waited for the Old Man's company to declare itself. As the noise began he would have smiled as he lay there had his cheeks been capable of any relaxation. As they were not, he made small sounds of pure enjoyment with his throat. To all intents and purposes,

Mr. Tufts crooned. At the Old Man's threat and Red's ineffectual pleading he even chortled.

"Now laugh and be damned!" he said.

He was up and at his window for the shot, and when it came it was music to his ears. Any slight anxiety he had felt as to his failure at the last moment to remove his trunk strap from Bill's neck was swallowed up in satisfaction.

"You will little-Goldilocks me, eh?" he muttered to the absent Red. "Well, who is little Goldilocks now?"

After the shot was fired he drew his curtain and turned on the light. Just as well to be sure that no traces of Bill remained in his cabin. He picked up the bottle and hid it and then glanced at his trunk. Suddenly he felt a chill start at his feet and travel slowly up to the top of his head. He walked unsteadily to his bed and sat down on it. He felt very weak and extremely homesick. His thoughts turned to his apartment in New York City, and with its neat stack of the *Rider and Driver* and the *Spur*; his livery horse on Saturday afternoons, and its complete absence of bears. He yearned for it with a sort of hopeless nostalgia, but most of all he yearned to have his trunk strap back again. He had suddenly remembered that his initials were painted on it!

He was still sitting there when the Old Man came to his cabin and pounded on his door. He made no

response, but the Old Man needed no invitation. He stalked in and confronted Mr. Tufts as he sat, wrapped in a bed quilt against the chill he was having.

"Mr. Tufts," he said sternly, "do you happen to know this strap?"

"I put it on Bill to drag him out of this cabin. Sure I know it!"

"Oh!" said the Old Man, sniffing the air, which was still alcoholic. "And so you put it on Bill, eh? And then you got Bill drunk and fastened him in my cabin! I'll tell you something, Mr. Tufts. In the old days in this country we shot men for less, and I guess you'd better get away from here before I lose the hold I've got on myself. Why, you poor son of a sea cook, that bear wasn't Bill; he was a wild bear!"

It was again a Sunday evening. All over the upper meadow the tired horses were spread, grazing and resting their saddle-worn backs. Blacks, whites, bays, chestnuts, roans, backskins, sorrels and pintos, and even the Old Man's Palamina—they were hardly more than varicolored dots on the side of the steep pasture below the mountains. Red looked up from the creek bank and surveyed them with an appraising eye.

"Pretty good bunch of horses," he said.

"Yes," said Nancy, following his gaze. "That pinto Mrs. Smith's riding has a quarter crack, Red."

"How's Flinder's back?"

"It's better; but he can't be ridden yet."

Well, life wasn't so bad after all, Red reflected. To sit here with a girl who talked your own language, even if that was as far as anything could possibly go—well, it was a lot. He had a lot to be thankful for. He sighed.

The Prairie Lily came out of his pocket and crawled over onto Nancy's lap, and Bill the Bear jealously tried to shove her off with a clumsy overgrown paw.

"Funny how the livestock takes to you," he said heavily. "You—you kinda belong out here, Nancy."

"Yes?" she said, and waited.

But at that moment a rainbow shot up at his fly and took it.

He swung it out of the water, but before he could get it, Bill had retrieved and swallowed it.

"Dog-gone you, Bill," said Red gloomily, and lapsed into silence.

"You were saying," Nancy prompted gently, "that I sort of belonged out here."

"Yeah," he said, and absently cast again. "Well, you do—that's all. . . . There's a big fellow under that rock. Watch!"

"I wish you'd stop fishing and just talk, Red."

He turned a haggard young face toward her.

"What'll I talk about?" he demanded. "About my fifty dollars a month? And riding Earthquake next month at the county fair?"

"About your place on the Rosbud," she said, "and the cabin on it—you know."

"It's got two chairs and a table in it," he said roughly. "And a built-in bunk for a bed. That's not much to talk about."

"You forgot the stove, Red. And you said there was winter feed."

"Winter feed for what? I couldn't afford to stock it with jack rabbits."

"But I could, Red. I've been wanting to buy some stock. My father raised some of the best horses in the country, and I guess it's in my blood. And—he left me quite a little money."

He reeled in his line. A fish rose to it, but he paid no attention.

"I'm not taking anybody's money, Nancy."

"But if you provided the land and I the stock—that's a fifty-fifty proposition, Red. It's a partnership."

"What sort of a partnership?"

"I thought I'd let you draw up the agreement the way you'd like it," she said quietly, and sat looking up at the horses above the slope. "That foal of old Jess's is becoming quite a horse," she said. But Red

had dropped his rod and was staring at her incredulously.

"Do you mean," he said, "that you'd be willing to wear my brand—for keeps?"

"If—if it's a circle, Red."

"You bet it's a circle!" he said hoarsely, and took her into his strong young arms.

The Prairie Lily sat up delicately on Nancy's lap and wiggled her small nose. Receiving no attention, she bit appraisingly at the beads of Oolong Tea on Red's leather vest, which seemed to be unusually close at hand. But no one noticed her.

"Do you really and truly love me, Red, after I've been so hateful to you?"

"Love you, girl! Why, say, I'm just plumb loco about you! Loco!" He stroked her soft hair. "Loco," he repeated. "You'll have to put me in the box stall and starve me."

"And keep you off the wood?"

"Suffering cats, no!" he said, and kissed her.

The Prairie Lily rattled slightly in Red's pocket on the way home, containing as she did a considerable assortment of beads. But no one noticed it.

AN ERROR IN TREATMENT

The day Anne applied for admission to the training school was the very first time she had even seen the inside of a hospital. She noticed the smell of it the moment she entered: lysol and formaldehyde and soap, all mixed together into something indescribable. And she put her handkerchief to her nose. It was a very nice nose, by the way.

However, nobody was yelling or anything of that sort at the time, and that made it easier.

But the moment the head of the training school saw her, and gathered what she was after, she said, "My dear child, you are so very young!"

"I am older than I look," said Anne. "I shall soon be——" And then she had swallowed and told a white lie. Not her first; she was a perfectly normal young woman. "I shall soon be twenty," she said. And she went on, rather red from the effort, to enumerate her accomplishments. "I have nursed a lot, really," she said breathlessly. "People and dogs and——and everything. And I speak French and I can make people comfortable. I really can. And that's important in nursing, isn't it?"

"Very important indeed," said the head, and

glanced thoughtfully over Anne's shoulder at an old photograph of a young man on her table.

It was the enlargement of a snapshot, and rather out of focus, but she was used to that after all these years. And the photograph distinctly said, "Don't be foolish. She's too young. Send her home and let her live her own life."

"But I don't get many of this sort now," she pleaded. "Not since the war."

Anne, of course, heard nothing of all this. It was strictly *sotto voce*. She had been staring out the window, to where an irascible old gentleman in a wheeled chair was stealthily feeding a cat with something he had hidden in his pocket. He was pretending to be doing nothing of the sort, but she saw it distinctly.

"I like old people, too," she said suddenly. "And old people like me too. I—I humor them."

The head simply turned her back on the photograph. What else could she do? As she had said to the picture, she didn't have many applicants like this one nowadays, and the war enthusiasts hadn't stuck at all. The very first sight of a small insect with a long name—pediculosis, it is called on the symptom charts—had usually cooled their fine frenzy, and a morning over sputum cups generally finished them.

Anne was trying to think of her other accomplishments.

"I am really quite strong, too," she said. "I don't look it, but I am. I've played golf and ridden a great deal. I could lift. I know that."

"Have you no family?" asked the head, weakening by inches.

"I have a father and a—stepmother," said Anne, and looked away. There were some things she didn't care to talk about. And the stepmother simply finished matters for the head.

"I am going to try you, Miss—" she looked at the visiting card in her hand—"Miss Rutherford. You know that the course is three years; during those three years you will be under the discipline of the school. And that discipline is very strict."

"I'll do my best," said Miss Rutherford bravely.

"It is not only a matter of rules," said the head. "There are certain ethics. You will be thrown in contact with many men, internes and visiting doctors. The staff. I need not say to you that your relations with them are to be purely professional."

"Oh, good gracious!" said Anne, flushing. "I'll be petrified with terror of them. I wouldn't even think——"

"No?" said the head, without any particular conviction. "Well, I hope so, anyhow."

And so Anne Rutherford had gone away. She

very nearly backed out of the room, as one does from royalty, because the head had a sort of majesty about her. Whenever she swept into a board meeting the men always got up, and they simply handed her what she asked for, from sterilizers to extra dieticians. They even respected the manner in which she ignored the fact that they received eighty-six cents a day for patients which cost the hospital "four dollars per patient per diem," as the reports read.

"I am no mathematician," she would say, and pass a slim white hand over her whiter forehead.

So Anne Rutherford went home and told her people. And her stepmother only raised her eyebrows and said if she must do something, why choose to be a sort of upper servant? She said exactly that. But her father went out and took a long walk.

She ran into the man in this story the very first day. Nothing had been quite up to specifications, up to that minute.

There was a strike among the bathroom scrubbers, and so she was put to cleaning the ward bathroom. She was on her knees scrubbing the floor when she heard him walking down the corridor, with that peculiar authority which belongs to the staff alone. New internes have it for the first week or so. After that they learn that there are still a

number of things they do not know, and so they rather slip around, trying to learn them.

Trotting along beside him in her high-heeled shoes was the day supervisor, Miss Brent.

And the moment she heard his voice, before she had turned her head and looked up over her shoulder, something happened to Anne. It is like that sometimes. Nobody knows what it is. Some people think it is chemical, but others say it is a matter of positive and negative polarization, whatever that may be. Anyhow, Anne knew at once that something queer had happened to her, and when she looked up at him—well, he was up to specifications, undoubtedly.

She looked up at him, and he stopped and said, "What on earth are you doing that for?"

And what did the little idiot do but burst into tears. They spoiled her looks and splashed into the scrubbing pail, and Miss Brent eyed her scornfully and said, "Don't be so silly! You'll have considerably worse things to do than this."

She sat back on her heels then and looked at them both. Like a kitten facing a pair of terriers, rather, and she said, "Is there anything in the rules about my smiling when I do this?"

"There is something in the rules about courtesy to the staff," snapped Miss Brent, and moved away.

Heavens! He was staff!

Well, of course it was just hardly believable, any way one looks at it. Because Anne could see at a glance that he was vain and cynical, for all his good looks, and that he liked to have Miss Brent put on her high-heeled shoes in his honor, and trot around at his elbow while pretending her feet did not hurt like anything.

There was quite a joke in the hospital about those shoes, and it was not long before Anne heard it: Miss Brent on the second floor, near the head of the staircase, about the time he was due; and then the slam of the front door, and his deep voice below, for one could always hear him. He seemed to think that lowering his voice was to lower his flag somehow; and he would never lower his flag. Never. And after that Miss Brent scurrying off, and back in a jiffy in a fresh cap and apron and the high-heeled shoes, before he had more than registered in on the card in the office and given the pharmacy clerk the devil about something or other.

Anne heard about that, and about other things. For instance, his name was Rakigh, and he was a surgeon. According to the training school, he was a great surgeon.

"It's a lesson to watch him," somebody told her, "but it's dangerous too."

"Why?" Anne asked, drinking in every word.

"Because he's perfectly beastly when he's work-

ing," said the girl. "He has a dreadful temper, and when things go wrong——" Words failed her. She made a gesture.

Well, he really was all that, as it turned out. Anne used to think it was because he was an orphan, but the truth is that the hospital had spoiled him shockingly. They had made a sort of cult of him; when he entered, slamming the big front door, the word passed with the rapidity of news in the African jungle.

"R. C. is in," they said. There had been another Raleigh on the staff once, so he was called R. C. Every hospital has somebody it knows by his given initials.

The nurses in the operating room would burst into a final frenzy, and in the surgical wards little probationers would run around and straighten things. He never knew; or, rather he took all this for granted. Oh, they certainly had spoiled him. They simply roared at his feeblest jokes, when he condescended to make them.

"Doctor, this bed isn't comfortable," some fretful patient would complain.

And he would look down from his height—he was a big man—and say, "I don't give a damn how the bed feels. Are *you* comfortable?"

They would quote a silly joke like that over and

over: "Did you hear what R. C. said to Thirty-one?" they would say.

They even took a certain pride in his bad tempers, when they came.

"R. C.'s on the warpath," they would whisper about. "Listen!"

They could always tell, because of the way he slammed things about. He always slammed things, but there was a difference.

One can see that trying to bring Anne and this godlike creature together isn't an easy matter. It is perfectly certain that during her entire probation period he never saw her at all. She used to listen for him coming down the hall. Thud, thud, he came along, like the President of the United States stalking into Congress, and thump, thump, went poor Anne's idiotic heart. But he never knew she was there. It's a wonder he didn't walk over her once or twice.

It took five months for him to notice her, and nobody can claim that it was particularly auspicious when it came. There was a dressing being done, and the case wasn't doing well. There was pus, and he looked at everybody, nurses and internes, as though he thought they had had it about them somewhere, and had contaminated the wound just to annoy him.

"Where the hell are the scissors?" he said. And

when they showed him—they were just where they should have been—he cut something open and said to Anne, "Here, hold this."

And she did not hear him! She was looking down at his bent head, with a perfectly ridiculous desire to pat it and tell him not to be so silly. She often thought a little mothering would do him good.

And he fixed her with an awful eye and said, "*Hold this! Are you deaf?*"

"No," she said. "But I will be if you shout like that."

The head nurse went quite pale and waited. She was sure there would be an explosion. But he only looked up at Anne coldly and went on with his work. Anne's hands shook terribly, but she managed to hold on; and there was less pus than the day before, and everybody cheered up.

But he had noticed her. When Anne handed him a towel, after he had scrubbed his steady surgeon's hands, he looked at her and said kindly enough, "There's no time for politeness in a surgical dressing, my child."

And of course she should have said, "There's no time for rudeness, either." She thought of that later. But what she did was to let her silly eyes fill with tears, and he just looked at her and said, "Oh, for God's sake!" and stamped out.

She didn't blame him at all. She was not a crying sort, but of course she couldn't very well say, "I wouldn't mind it if the whole staff lined up in a row and shouted at me. But with you, it's different. It hurts."

She used to sit up in her narrow bed at night, rubbing her feet with witch hazel—only it is hama-melis in a hospital—and reflect bitterly that the only two times he had ever really seen her she had been crying.

"You darned little fool!" she would say savagely, and then remember she had forgotten her prayers, and get out and say them, kneeling on her bare floor. She actually put him in them, and it is certainly interesting to wonder what he would have thought if he had known he was being prayed for.

So time went on. She was moved out of the surgical ward, finally, and there were three dreadful months when she never saw him at all, or only from a distance. Once she was in the elevator, and as they passed a floor he was waiting there, tall and broad-shouldered, and all a man should be—except for his disposition—but the elevator man did not see him, and went on down.

He just put his finger on the button and kept it there. He would, of course.

And then she went on night duty. That's what started it all.

She was given the men's surgical and the emergency wards, and the head of the training school sent for her and gave her a little talk.

She advised her about sleep and exercise, and then she said, "Night duty is hard duty, Miss Rutherford. You will be alone, and the responsibility is heavy." And then she took a long look at Anne, and she said, "You are terribly thin, my dear."

"But I feel all right," said Anne Rutherford brightly, and with a spasm at her heart. Because, what if they should send her away?

"You might have your tonsils looked at," said the head. She considered that the roots of tonsils were the roots of all evils. And when Anne had gone she looked at the picture and said, "It's her turn for night duty, you know."

And the photograph said, "She looks ill. I warned you. She's too young. She lied about her age."

"But she's doing very well."

"Yes, but how about her illusions? She's lost them, hasn't she? She's lost something. Look at her."

And so it went on back and forth, from tonsils to illusions, but not a word about her heart. Which shows that she was keeping her secret extremely well.

She went on night duty, and after a while she began to think that life was a sort of moonflower,

which only showed its heart in the darkness. It was while the sun was on the other side of the world that babies were born and people died. It was at night, too, that the bars were down, all day the human race inhibited its passions and its rages, but at the end of the day it wearied. The unfair battle was lost, and lost and tragedy won out.

She had the men's surgical ward and the emergency room, and she began to know the rumble of the patrol wagon as it came up the street. Sometimes she got the case, and ran around filling hot-water bags and getting out instruments. But often the elevator passed her floor and moved quietly up toward the operating room on the top floor, with its policeman and internes grouped around some quiet cargo on a stretcher.

The emergency ward was always ready. Its two iron beds side by side, covered with gray blankets, its white surgical case, with the instruments in tidy rows; its washstand and its bare and shining floor—always they were ready.

The very door was always open. To Anne, slipping around in her rubber-soled shoes, it seemed to say to whatever tragedy was coming along the hall, "Come on in, and let's see what we can do for you."

But night duty cut her off from seeing him. Except once, and then he probably didn't recognize

her. She was passing by the emergency ward, having been relieved to go to her midnight supper of hot coffee and cold salmon, when she looked in, and there he was. He was getting an instrument from the case and muttering to himself, and when he heard her he called, "Where the dickens is the hypodermic that belongs here?"

"It's there, doctor," she said, and got it for him. He took it without a word and hurried out.

It wasn't much, but she fed on it that night, along with the hot coffee and the cold salmon.

"Something nice has happened to Lady Diana," said the night nurse from G Ward, when she had hurried out. They called her that behind her back, because she was supposed to look like Lady Diana Manners; only more wiseful and quite a bit younger, of course.

"Well, it wasn't this supper," said F Ward. "I've eaten so much canned salmon that I'm ready to bite a hook."

Anne did not see so much of Miss Brent now, or of the head either. But one evening she went back to her linen room, having given the ten-o'clock medicines, and there was Miss Brent. She looked very odd in her street clothes, and she had a scrap of paper in her hand.

"Do you mind sending this down in the pharmacy basket?" she said.

Anne took the paper, and she saw that it was in R. C.'s writing. Something danced in front of her eyes, for it was on his private office paper.

"I hope you are not ill," she said very politely.

"I'm not well," said Miss Brent. There were two bright spots of color on her cheeks. "And there's no use talking to the staff here. Especially to R. C. There's always a crowd around him."

Anne took the paper and put it in the pharmacy basket. And all the time something inside her was saying, "She's been to see him." She carried the basket to the elevator and rang the bell, and she was thinking, "He would like that. He likes her, because she is crazy about him. They are all like that, and I would die first."

She marched back to her linen room with her head very high indeed, and Miss Brent was still there. She had the order book open, and was staring at an order in a very firm hand, which said, "Jones, hot-water compresses every 15 minutes. R. C. R."

Miss Brent stayed for some time. She simply had to talk about R. C. to somebody. She didn't much care who.

"One can really have confidence in him," she said, "and that's more than you can say for some of them."

"I dare say he is clever," Anne said rebelliously, "only he's so disagreeable."

"Disagreeable!" said Miss Brent, staring at her furiously. "How can you say that? He's lonely, and he's very much overworked. That's all."

But she could not afford to quarrel with Anne. She was, so to speak, in Anne's hands just then. For she knew, and she knew Anne knew, that by all the laws of the hospital she could not go to R. C.'s private office. She had broken a rule.

Even the pharmacy clerk knew it, and when the basket came back it contained a bottle, and a slip of paper around the bottle. And on it the pharmacy clerk had written, in small clear letters such as he used on labels, the words "How come?"

But Miss Brent was really past caring, in a way. She went back to her room and set to work on a new cap. You see, a nurse's cap is rather like a man's necktie; it is her one touch of frivolity.

Anne, however, who was so busy that her caps generally looked as though some one had set a foot on them, sat down and rested her tired feet, and worried about things: If he was lonely; why he was lonely; and why he was so gentle to the children in the children's ward, and so perfectly beastly otherwise; and particularly why she, herself, was such a fool about him.

She found it very hard to sleep in the daytime. She tied a black silk stocking over her eyes, but what with the ambulance driving in and out, and other nurses washing their hair in their off-duty periods, it was really hard. Not that the ambulance bothered her so much; she had learned that quite often, when it clanged through the crowded streets and traffic parted to let it go by, it was only the senior surgical interne going after a package of cigarettes.

But the lack of sleep got on her nerves, rather. And Miss Brent seemed to feel that in a way the bars were down between them, and after evening prayer in the chapel she used to slip back to Anne's linen room and talk and talk. About R. C., of course.

Anne got a little ragged. Then too she had no place to go any more. Her father and stepmother had gone abroad. The stepmother had barked her way to the Riviera, pretending to have a weak chest. And they had turned off old Henry, who had been the butler for years without number, and now he was in the medical ward with pneumonia.

And about that time they brought in a newsboy who had been run over, and he died in Anne's arms before the interne could be got out of bed.

So when an operating room nurse came to the midnight supper sniffing, and said she had been

insulted by Doctor Raleigh, Anne said rather sharply, "Well, what did you do? You must have done something."

They stared at her incredulously, all of them, over their cold sliced pot-roast. It was pot-roast that night for a change. And she felt exactly like Miss Brent, only more so.

"To fall for a man because he is good-looking!" she said to herself bitterly. "And because this place makes a tin god of him! It's—it's hateful!"

She tried to pull herself together.

She got up at four o'clock in the afternoon, and took her bath and tidied her room. Then she had her early supper, at five o'clock, and after that she took her walk. She had to go through a rather bad part of town, and sometimes men spoke to her. She was really very lovely, although she was terribly thin and rather wan. But she was learning a lot of things, and she wasn't frightened any more.

She just looked at them quite simply and said, "Haven't you made a mistake?" And nine out of ten of them would touch their hats and go right away.

Then poor old Henry died, and she felt entirely alone. That evening she went out and stood on a bridge for a long time. Not because she wanted to jump in the river, but because it was the only place near by where she could feel alone for a minute.

She was standing there wiping her eyes, for Henry, of course, when a car stopped, and a very arbitrary voice said, "What in the world are you doing here?"

"I just wanted to be alone."

He sat in the car and stared at her. "Alone?" he said. "And why should you want to be alone?"

"Don't you ever want to be alone?" she asked, with a small flash of her old spirit.

"What's that got to do with it?" he said roughly. But he was more polite after that. "Get in," he said, "and I'll take you back. This is no place for a girl at night."

"I'm not supposed to do that, am I?" she said, with the rule in mind, naturally.

And then he threw back his head and laughed. He had a rather nice laugh, although husky from want of use.

"Oh, damn the rules!" he said. "Get in, and don't be foolish." He tucked her in really gently, with those surgeon's hands of his, and started the car. But before he did it he took a good look at her, under the arc lamp, and he said, "Upon my soul I believe you've been crying again!"

That outraged her, and it must be said that the drive back was not what one might call chatty. He asked her once if she was cold, and she said, "Thanks, I'm all right." And that was all. But the

part that has to do with this story comes at the hospital itself. For he stopped there and helped her out; and Miss Brent was on the doorstep!

She went quite white, and she stood aside and let Anne pass her. But she did not speak a word; very probably she couldn't.

About nine o'clock that night Miss Brent went into the head's little parlor. The head eyed her; she had been her day supervisor for ten years, and she knew about the shoes that hurt, and a great many other things. So she was generally kind to Miss Brent; she even mentioned her to the photograph now and then.

"It's really a tragedy," she would say when Miss Brent had particularly annoyed her about something.

"She's an old fool," said the photograph ruthlessly.

"But she can't help it."

"Nonsense!" said the photograph. "Falling in love is a purely voluntary act." Anne could have told it something about that, but she wasn't around.

So Miss Brent came in that night, and the head knew the moment she saw her that she was on the warpath.

"How is Miss Jones doing in D Ward?" said the head.

"Nothing," said Miss Brent. "I never saw such a medicine closet."

"And the probationer in A?"

"Personally," said Miss Brent, "I think she's flighty. But, of course, if you like her——"

She eyed the photograph malignantly—it always seemed to watch her with cynical eyes—and then she went down the list. The diet kitchen was late with its trays; the engineer had not repaired the sterilizer; and so on. All in all, it was perfectly clear that the hospital was in an extremely bad way.

So the head waited, because she knew the signs, and at last Miss Brent said, "There is something else. I hardly know how to speak about it. It's about Miss Rutherford."

"What about Miss Rutherford?" inquired the head, rather dryly.

"She's been out driving with Doctor Raleigh."

The head stared at her.

"Are you sure of that?"

"I was on the steps when he brought her back tonight."

There was agony as well as triumph in Miss Brent's face, but there was truth also. The head's small world rocked about her.

"Thanks very much, Miss Brent," she said quietly. "I'll look into it."

And she did look into it, but she took a wrong method, which was unusual in her. As a matter of fact, she knew she had a weakness for Anne Rutherford, and she didn't quite trust herself. So she spoke to R. C. himself about it, and the fat was in the fire for sure.

"Oh!" he said with a cold smile. "So that's it! I'm not to take your precious nurses joy-riding!"

"I didn't use that word, doctor, and I am sure there is some explanation. I only——"

"Is there a rule to that effect?"

"It is an unwritten rule."

"Well, it's a darned-fool one," he said. "As a matter of fact——"

But somebody came up just then and interrupted them. And it shows the sort he was that the more he thought over the thing the rest of that day the angrier he got, and the more pleased he was that he hadn't explained.

He had seen Miss Brent on the steps, too—he had very sharp eyes—and he saw her fine hand in it.

He was extremely cool to her that day, and that night when he went home he ate hardly any dinner. His old butler—it was strange, perhaps, but his servants adored him—was quite anxious.

"There's a caramel custard, sir," he said. He knew that the doctor loved caramel custard.

But the doctor only looked at him and said,

"There are a lot of hypocrites in the world, Briggs."

Maybe he was thinking of Miss Brent, breaking a rule herself and coming to see him. Maybe not. One did not know always what he was thinking.

He slept very badly that night, but don't get the idea that Anne Rutherford had anything to do with it. She was a small and unimportant figure who hardly entered his consciousness at all. He was simply overworked and tired, and egocentric, if you know what that means. It is a poor combination.

He wakened out of humor too. And the soap fell out of his shower bath and went under the tub, and his eggs were too soft. Anyone can see here the makings of a tragedy. Men have been murdered for less. And he worked hard all day, and a child he was fond of seemed to be worse, and nothing more to do that he could think of. So by the time he reached the hospital there was something in the very way he banged the entrance door that made the colored man there roll up his eyes.

He marched straight to the superintendent's office, thud, thud, and marked himself in on the register. The superintendent was a man, and he was used to medical men. He knew just how many paying patients they sent in, and how many operating room fees the hospital received through them.

So he smiled benignly over his glasses and said, "Nice day, doctor."

It really was, too, but that's neither here nor there. "Look here," said R. C., fixing him with a baleful glance, "what's this about nurses not being allowed in staff cars?"

"There's no such rule," said the superintendent cravenly.

"Then if I want to ask one of your nurses to go for a ride, it's all right?"

"I wouldn't go as far as that," said the superintendent, more carefully. "There's no rule, but it's an understood thing. Discipline——"

"Discipline hell!" said our unregenerate, in a loud clear tone. "I pick up a girl who's alone where she oughtn't to be, and bring her back here, and you'd think I'd abducted her!"

And then the superintendent made his mistake. Everybody was doing it.

"Why don't you tell the board that?" he said. "I'm sure——"

"The board!" roared Doctor Raleigh. "D'you mean to say the board's got it?"

"It leaked out somewhere," said the superintendent, cying his desk. He had only a brass-edged ruler, but if it came to the worst at least it was something.

But there were no blows. R. C. marched out of

the office to the elevator, thud, thud, and told the elevator man to find Miss Rutherford and send her down to him. He bit off a piece of his thumbnail while he waited and the rest might have gone, too, but then Anne came down the stairs ready for her walk, looking rather pale with anxiety, and saved them.

"Do you want to see me?" she asked.

"Yes," he said. "Will you come with me, please?"

He hardly saw her, you understand. His inner eyes were fixed on the board meeting the next day, and the bomb he was going to throw into it. She was really looking quite lovely, but she might have been a bit of dust that had got into his eye, for all he noticed her. Rather less, indeed.

She was puzzled, but she didn't greatly care one way or the other. Things were that way with her that day. She knew that something was wrong, but she didn't know just what. So she followed him out the door, to his automobile, and he opened the car door.

"Get in," he commanded.

"Why?"

"I'll tell you about that later on," he told her. And he looked at the hospital windows, especially the board room. There was nobody in sight except the superintendent, and he seemed to be supporting himself by a window sill.

Then he lit the fuse of his bomb. That is, he got into the machine beside her and stepped on the gas, and they shot down the street. He kept her out for precisely one hour. And all the time he hardly spoke to her.

Once he said, "Are you cold?" And she said she wasn't.

And another time he almost ran into another car, and she said, very politely, "If you're going to kill me, would you mind explaining first?"

"Explaining what?" But he knew, of course, perfectly well.

"Just why we are riding around like this. Do you want to be arrested?" Which was no way to speak to the stuff under any circumstances.

He slowed up at that, somewhat, and he smiled at her. She had never seen him smile like that, and it went to her head.

"Maybe I thought you needed fresh air."

"If I did I could raise my window. It would certainly be safer."

He even laughed a little, then. He had made his point, you see, and maybe the fresh air had helped him. It was a long time since he had taken a ride for a ride's sake. But finally he stopped—it was in front of a rural grocery store—and he told her.

"I'm no bad child," he said, his anger rising again when he thought about it. "I slave for their old

hospital; they couldn't get along without me. And then they bring me—me—before the board!"

"And me," said Miss Rutherford. "Maybe you had forgotten that?"

"If they put you out we'll go together," he announced grimly.

"That would help me a great deal, of course," said Anne Rutherford. Oh, believe me, she was bitter! There was acid in her voice. Anyone can see that these two were not really heroic characters at all. It is rather hard to write a romance about them.

But it was in a way a good thing for her, that ride and all, because she knew then and there that she did not love him at all. She detested him. And he knew it too. It is a curious fact that he had never noticed her, for herself, until he saw how she detested him. And because he was not used to being *persona non grata*, he became very sulky, and spent all the time going back justifying himself to himself, as any man will.

Anne walked into the hospital with her head high, and she saw at once that things were very bad indeed. There were, here and there, faces turned toward her; but nobody spoke to her except the pharmacy clerk. He was lounging in the door of the pharmacy, and he nodded to her.

She went straight up to her tiny bedroom to put

on her uniform, and under the door was a note on the pharmacy stationery, in the handwriting that was on all the bottle labels: "R.: He got you into this. Make him get you out."

Half an hour later Miss Brent tapped at her door. She was quite white, and her eyes looked cold and dead.

"You are excused from duty tonight," she said. "Miss Swift will take your place." Then she went away.

One cannot follow the two of them through that night, in detail. The girl sat at her window until nearly dawn, but the man went to bed. You'd know that he would. But to be fair to him, he didn't sleep. He kept seeing the girl, who looked like a nice little thing. There at the end she had looked like Lady Diana Manners in a temper—only he had never seen Lady Diana Manners in a temper. Toward morning, however, he had a bright thought and that cheered him greatly.

"That ought to settle them!" he said, and grinned. Then he turned over and went to sleep like a child. Oh, he was a great fixer, all right.

Now a hospital board is a terrifying thing. It deals largely with dollars and cents, and deficits. And it cherishes a fond belief that its doctors and nurses may record fevers on their charts, but that

personally they never vary from the 98.6 degrees of the normal temperature, nor by a heart throb from seventy-six.

But this particular morning this board had been shaken out of its financial coma.

Old Mr. Blackstone sat at the head of the table, where he had sat for thirty years, and surveyed the room gloomily.

"It's the first time it has happened in all my experience," he said.

That was the trouble, of course. They had no precedent.

"Then I understand that the question before the board is——"

"The girl must go, certainly. Evidently she has trapped Raleigh somehow, and——"

The superintendent opened the door and stuck his head in. He was looking very uneasy.

"He's coming now, gentlemen," he said, almost in a whisper, and dodged out as if somebody had been about to attack him from the rear. Which wasn't entirely unlikely, at that.

Well, he was coming. He was coming along the hall, thud, thud, and he walked into that board room like a king, and slammed the door behind him.

Then he glowered at the board and said, "I understand this board wants to see me."

They didn't, at all, as soon as they laid eyes on him. They wanted him about as much as they wanted smallpox. They wanted peace, and to expel Anne Rutherford, and then to go comfortably to lunch at the club.

Mr. Blackstone cleared his throat.

"A very unfortunate situation has arisen, doctor. As a matter of discipline——"

"Oh, to hell with discipline!" said Doctor Ral-
cigh. "I took the girl out. She had nothing to do
with it."

"She knew it was not permitted."

"But I took her, I tell you."

"She went," said Mr. Blackstone, and looked at
the rest of the board for approval.

Things grew really terrible after that. The board
was frightened, but it had taken its stand, and no
one had the courage to suggest a diplomatic retreat.
There are people who say that R. C. threw an ink-
well, but possibly this is a mistake. He probably
only upset it. They wouldn't accept his resigna-
tion, although he offered it three times at the top
of his voice, and he was still in and Anne was out
after a half hour.

Then he exploded his bombshell, not exactly the
one he had meant to explode the day before, but it
answered.

He was very cool now, and suddenly ironic.

"So far," he said, "I have been fighting for a principle. If I have failed to convince this board, it is probably because principles are not directly in its line."

The board stiffened.

"There is, however, another angle to this matter. Not moral. One might call it sentimental. Even in hospitals, you see, the microbe of—er—affection cannot be successfully fought."

Oh, believe me, they sat up then.

"It may make a difference in the status of—er—the young lady"—he had actually forgotten her name for the moment, but then he was excited, for all he seemed to be so cool—"when I say that I have every intention of asking her to be my wife."

They were stunned, actually stunned. Mr. Blackstone was the first to recover.

"In that case, of course——" he began ponderously.

"I know what you are going to say," said R. C. blithely. He was beginning to enjoy himself. "But our plans are still vague. I have no intention of taking away a nurse so proficient as"—he had to think—"as Miss Rutherford. She will finish her training."

He made a magnificent gesture. One could see a wedding in it, and ushers, and the whole staff sending presents, and the board itself in morning

coats and carrying top hats, creaking up the aisle of a church. Certainly he was thorough. He convinced them and he almost convinced himself. And when it was over the board got up, slightly stunned, and went away. It shook his hand as it went out, and got into its automobiles and drove off, still dazed, and left him standing there.

He had fixed everything. He was so pleased with himself that he was whistling as he went out and ordered Miss Rutherford sent down to him in the board room. The board wouldn't talk; it had expressly suggested silence because of discipline. And now all he had to do was to explain to the girl, and everything would be all right.

Anne came in. She was quite calm and in her going-away clothes, as one may say, and she looked ridiculously pretty and most unpleasant.

"Well?" she said. At least she didn't have to be civil to him any more. What was the staff to her now?

"Well, yourself!" he said cheerfully. "I've fixed it, my dear."

"I loathe being called my dear," she stated flatly, and eyed him.

"Still, under the circumstances, some term of affection is implied."

"What circumstances?"

So he told her. He expatiated a bit, perhaps, on

how well he had managed, and all that, and that now everything was all right, and he never noticed the queer look in her eyes. It was distinctly a dangerous look. She had grown up quite a lot in the hospital, and she was nobody's floor mat by that time. But this had not occurred to him.

"So now, you see," he finished, "you can go up and take off your hat. It's all fixed."

"But is it?" Anne asked, smiling strangely. "You haven't done what you agreed to, have you?"

He remembered then and laughed a little. Oh, it was a great joke.

"Of course!" he said. "Miss Rutherford, will you marry me?"

And Anne gave him a long cold look.

"Yes," she said, most distinctly, and then she turned and went out of the room.

One really feels like drawing a veil here for a while. Better just to leave him there, I imagine, staring at that door and muttering "My God!" under his breath.

There are those who remember that he acted very strangely all that day, however. Every now and then he would stop what he was doing and stare for a while at nothing at all. And he was gentle. Some of the nurses thought he must be going to be sick or something. He didn't bang a door once, and

when he found his bottle of glycerin and rose water empty he didn't throw it on the floor, as everybody expected.

But he did matter to himself every now and then. His lips were seen to move as he walked down the corridors.

He didn't see Anne at all that day. As a matter of fact she was lying face down on her bed most of it, telling herself how she hated him, and that she was perfectly justified in paying him back.

"He needed a lesson," she said. "If I just have the strength to carry it through."

It was he who sat up that night, walking the floor and smoking himself to death, and Anne who went to bed. She had got the strength by that time, and if she lay awake it was to think of ways to make him suffer.

"I'll teach him!" she said. "Ordering me out with him, and then acting as if he'd saved my reputation!"

There is no record of Miss Brent at this time, but it is fairly safe to assume that she was lying awake also. She undoubtedly considered that Anne had trapped R. C. And when one thinks about it, she had indeed.

Anne went on day duty the next morning, and then began a really dreadful time, each one avoid-

ing the other like poison, and the hospital watching and waiting, they didn't know for what.

When they did meet, it was R. C. who looked conscious; Anne had more poise. She would give him a dazzling smile and go on. But there they were, really engaged, and the seal of the board on it. Believe me, he saw her now, all right.

He thought she would weaken after a while, but she didn't at all. And finally in a fit of desperation he cornered her in a hallway and said, "Can I speak to you for a moment, Miss Rutherford?"

And she looked up at him sweetly—oh, very sweetly—and said, "I'm sorry. I'm frightfully busy just now."

She wouldn't have said that to the staff, and he knew it. She was deliberately presuming on what he thought of as their absurd, outrageous and totally uncalled-for relationship.

"Damn the girl!" he thought helplessly; and it shows the state of his mind that once when he was walking absent-mindedly along a street and saw a tray of engagement rings in a jeweler's window, he shied away from it like a scared horse.

One perceives that if there had been a time when she never entered on his horizon at all, she now practically shut off everything else. But if things were hard for him, they were not easy for Anne either. The school had learned something; she didn't know

what. It watched her and whispered. It watched him and whispered. But it couldn't watch them together, because that never happened.

After a while it began to dawn on it that Doctor Raleigh was constantly making occasion to see Anne alone, and that she was dodging them. Once he found her in a linen room, and went in and slammed the door. But the next minute it opened and Anne came out. He stayed there a while, pretending to want to smoke a cigarette, but when he came out his face was frightful.

The general belief was that they met outside, but a probationer put on to follow Anne reported that she simply went and stood on a bridge. She had met nobody.

Then one day Mrs. Blackstone came to have tea with the head, and after she had gone the head rang her bell.

"Send Miss Rutherford here," she said. Somebody seemed to be always ordering Anne about those days. But before Anne got there the head appealed to the picture.

"What am I to do?" she said helplessly. "He's such a violent man."

"But he is a man," said the picture. "And she has character. She'll gentle him. He's changed already; he doesn't slam in the way he used to."

As a matter of record, he didn't either. He came

in like a galley slave being scourged to whatever it was.

The total result of that interview will never be known. It is said that Miss Brent, going in later to report an orderly for smoking on duty, found she had curled up in her chair apparently helplessly weeping, but that it turned out she was laughing hysterically.

"It's a queer world, Miss Brent," she said. "A very queer world."

Miss Brent went to the pharmacy for some aromatic ammonia, but when she returned the head was herself again.

There came a time when Anne, going out after chapel for her evening walk, found R. C.'s car parked uncompromisingly in front of the hospital, and R. C. himself waiting on the step.

"Now!" he said. "Please—let's take a ride and talk this over."

If he had bullied her she wouldn't have gone, but he didn't. And she knew the porter was listening, so she said, "Why, of course. How nice!"

He looked at her suspiciously, but she was smiling blandly. Oh, she had learned a lot in these past months. She got in and powdered her nose carefully, and then she smiled at him delightfully and

said, "Just imagine! This is the first time we've been alone together since—it happened!"

"Now see here——" he began. And then words failed him. He stepped on the gas, and the way they shot up the street was a crime. Because he could stand a great many things, but not being played with. He said nothing whatever until they found a quiet street, and then he spoke.

"Look here," he said, "I lied to save you from a bad situation. If you think it is funny——"

"You got me into the situation. And I don't think it's funny."

"I'm a busy man, Miss Rutherford." He knew her name all right now. "And I'm not a particularly mild man."

"I'll tell the world you're not," she said, but he pretended not to hear.

"This—this nonsense," he began severely, "it can't go on. It upsets me. God only knows when some of those old fools will tell their wives, and——"

"They have already," she put in relentlessly.

Well, the way he carried on at that was something awful, and at the end all she did was to say in a quavering voice, "Don't tell me you want to break it off. I couldn't bear it."

That simply finished him. He started the car again and took her back to the hospital, but he never spoke another word. What could he say?

It was just three days after that that he met Mr. Blackstone on the street, and Mr. Blackstone pinched him in the ribs and said he was a lucky fellow. He—Mr. Blackstone—had seen the young lady.

"If she's as nice as she is pretty——" began Mr. Blackstone, heavily jocular.

"Oh, don't be such an ass!" said Doctor Raleigh rudely and violently.

But as there was a truck passing at the moment, Mr. Blackstone did not hear. He smiled pleasantly and went on.

The situation was, of course, entirely absurd; Doctor Raleigh began to spend his nights pacing the floor of his library and remarking aloud that it was the damndest-fool thing he had ever heard of, and he wouldn't have it for a minute. But what was he to do?

It is unlikely that he figured this out, but he certainly began to be very kind to Miss Brent after that. He would look at her fresh cap and her feet, if Anne was anywhere near, and say, "We're looking very smart today, aren't we?"

And Miss Brent would fairly twitter with happiness. Anne considered it sickening.

"Good heavens!" she reflected. "He's actually trying to make me jealous!"

She was, too, as a matter of fact. But that's neither here nor there.

Of course one has to remember certain things in discussing R. C. at this time. Here was Anne, without any background at all except the hospital, and that didn't count. You can't really tell much about a girl until you have seen her people, can you? Many a perfectly promising affair has been spoiled by father in his evening slippers, or mother's diaphragm—which is what one used to call the stomach.

And here was our hero—although nobody can really call him a hero—of a long line of noble ancestry, if he was a surgeon. His whole house was hung with very bad paintings of important but not handsome forebears. One of them had been a state treasurer and been indicted for taking the public funds, but he still hung. He should hang, of course.

But the point is that in the evenings, when he retired to his library, having eaten nothing worth mentioning, those pictures did their bit to make things worse.

Granduncle Thomas was particularly opposed. He hung over the mantel.

"What do you know about the girl?" he would demand.

"Nothing at all. And I don't want to."

"But you're engaged to her."

"Oh, fiddle-dee-dee!" he would snort. "I do my

best to get her out of trouble, and she takes me up on it!"

But he was fair, too; for once he assured Granduncle Thomas that she was intelligent, and showed breeding.

"So does a good horse," snarled Granduncle Thomas, who used to own a racing stable.

It is rather shameful to have to record the things he did, after that fairness of his. There seems to be no doubt that he flirted shamelessly with poor Miss Brent in odd corners, during the next few days, and that he chose those corners with an eye to Anne. Or that it finally got on Anne's nerves. Although she herself probably believes that, having taught him his lesson, it was time to clear things up.

As a matter of fact, though, much as she hated—or loved—him she didn't know him yet. He didn't have that jaw of his for nothing.

So one day, after a scene very carefully played for her benefit, she waited and then spoke to him.

"May I speak to you, doctor?" she said primly.

"At last!" His voice sounded triumphant. It was his turn now, you see. He'd played her floor mat for long enough.

He came in and closed the door. "Well, my dear?" he said, looking down at her.

"Don't you think it's time this ridiculous nonsense stops?"

"But I don't call it nonsense."

She looked a trifle alarmed, but she went on.

"Of course it was only a joke. A stupid joke on my part," she said breathlessly. "There is no engagement, of course. There never was, really. I——"

"But there was. There is. If you are trying to give me my congé, I refuse to take it."

"Oh, don't be funny!" she wailed. "And for goodness' sake open that door. Miss Brent's probably outside, watching."

But he didn't open the door. He came very close to her, and he looked exactly like a bad boy who knows he is bad and rather likes it. There is simply no excuse for him.

"You asked for this," he said, and he caught her to him and kissed her.

The next minute he was walking down the corridor, telling the junior surgical interne what cases he would see next.

He was very triumphant when he left the hospital that day. He'd shown her he was not to be fooled with. Two could play at that game! And all the rest of it. Every man knows what he said to himself, to keep his spirits up.

But it is a strange fact that he stopped in front of the jeweler's window on his way down the street, and stood there for some time.

It is all perfect nonsense to believe that people

fall in love first and kiss afterward. Everybody knows that very often people haven't an idea they are in love until they have kissed somebody. And then there they are.

It was Anne who staged the next scene, one may be sure. She made eyes at the junior surgical interne until he lost his head entirely. There was one awful day when R. C. said to him, "Where's the order book?"

And young Phillips was staring at Anne and never heard him.

"Order book!" yelled R. C. at the top of his lungs. "And if Miss Rutherford is distracting your attention we can call somebody else."

It was quite dreadful.

For a week or so things went on like this, each of them perfectly furious at the other, and neither of them sleeping very well, he jerking himself past that jeweler's window, and Anne working herself to death, and putting on a really terrible scowl the moment she heard his footsteps behind her.

She never went into the linen room without propping the door open with a chair. He saw the chair one day and smiled disagreeably. She needn't worry, he told himself. He wouldn't go in there.

But the way he hated the sight of that chair was funny. He kicked it once as he went by.

"What the hell's that chair doing there?" he demanded.

Anne was not there at the time.

And that was the way things stood when Anne was moved to the operating room. As the head said to the photograph, "It's got to be settled one way or the other. And she's due there."

"There's only one way to settle it," said the photograph. But it did not say what.

Anne wasn't keen about it. It meant seeing him every day, and wanting to slap him or pat him. Every woman knows that feeling, and how wearing it is. But of course she went, and her very first day there he almost killed her.

It happened like this: He had been upset at seeing her there. In the operating room he liked to feel like a god, dealing in life and death, and Anne upset his pose. He knew only too well that he was no god to her. And then, too, he liked to park his emotions downstairs with his street clothes, and have his feelings as—well, as sterile as his white operating suit. And whatever his feeling was for her it certainly wasn't downstairs in a coat pocket.

Then there was something about the way she handed him his towel after he had scrubbed up, something so coldly professional that it simply enraged him. And there was that fool, Phillips, ogling her over the instrument tray.

He did a fine operation, but as I have said, he nearly killed Anne. It was a dirty case, and when he had finished with a knife he held it out for Doctor Phillips to take, and Doctor Phillips was looking at Anne.

He threw the knife at the pan, and it struck Anne's hand and cut her. Oh, not much; he didn't even know he had done it. But there was a staphylococcus on the knife—maybe a million of them; one never knows, they breed simply frightfully—and she got it.

She went to bed with it three days later, and Miss Brent notified the senior surgical interne, who was engaged to a girl back home. He put some iodine on it, and then forgot about it.

But it kept getting worse. It hurt a lot. It jumped and ached, and she drank considerable water in the long nights, but she put the iodine on it and lay in her bed, not much caring. There wasn't a ring in the jeweler's window that would have fitted her then, poor child.

But R. C. didn't know about it. Somebody had asked him to go and shoot ducks, and he had gone. He shot a great many; he felt like killing something. Maybe young Phillips; nobody can tell. But he came back one day and did a lot of operations. Wheeled tables came in, one after the other, and

the voice of the anaesthetist in the outer room said "Breathe deeply, please," over and over.

"Operating room ought to pay a dividend this year," said the pharmacy clerk, downstairs, as he sent up his cans of ether.

When it was all over, R. C. washed up, and said nonchalantly, "Miss Rutherford left us?"

"She's sick, I believe," said the nurse.

He took his towel and dried his hands carefully; then he put it on a stack of new dressings, where it had no business to be, and went out.

What the devil had made her sick?

The way he shouted around when he found Anne was really shocking. And what he said to Miss Brent was—well, it was sufficient.

"Stop blubbering," he finished, "and get the operating room ready. Take off those shoes and get something you can run in!"

Well, that was that.

But don't think it is finished. It isn't at all.

When it came time to operate, he couldn't do it. It made the most amazing lot of talk at the time. He walked the floor outside the operating room while they took her in, and his hands were shaking so that he was afraid to pick up a knife.

Even then he hadn't the slightest idea why. He thought he must be going to be ill or something.

And all those internes and nurses waiting inside, and Anne herself, watching the door for him.

She was so sure it would be all right when he came! When the message came in that he had been called away, and that another member of the staff would be up in a minute, she just closed her eyes.

There are varying accounts of what happened afterwards, gathered from different sources. For instance, the superintendent claims he ran into the office like a crazy man and summoned the entire surgical staff by telephone. And we have the pharmacy clerk's word that he staggered in there and shouted, "*Give me some spiritus frumenti.*"

But Joe says that when it had been poured out he never took it, but rushed out again and held his finger on the elevator bell while it came down five floors. But the pharmacy clerk also says that before he rushed out he said, "I've been a damned fool, Joe."

The pharmacy clerk also maintains that he said in reply, "Yes, sir."

But this is doubtful.

There is, however, no dispute as to what happened next. He walked into the operating room, pushed the other surgeon aside without a word, and did a beautiful piece of work.

He had about finished when there was a noise

outside, and the rest of the staff trooped in. They thought there had been a train wreck.

But nobody knows exactly what happened in Anne's room later.

He had been quite shameless about things the night before. He had gone down to the head's room and fairly beat his breast; figuratively, of course. He knew by that time that he was responsible, you see. And the photograph, watching him, seemed well satisfied.

"He's through," it said. "He'll not go slamming and banging through life any more. You'll see."

"He will always be a violent man, my dear."

"Not to her," said the photograph. "Not to her."

But the plain truth was that he was evidently not going to be anything to her. For Anne herself, waking out of the anæsthetic and seeing him beside her, had said, "Oh, please go away. You just worry me."

In ether *veritas*. He knew that, and he went away. But he used to hang around outside her door, not caring a whoop what the hospital thought, and being perfectly abject to the man who had taken over the case. He was really pitiable. But Anne never knew this.

She didn't even know that he had operated and saved her life. Or that when he wasn't hanging

around her door he was wandering down the street looking in jewelers' windows. Not that he had any hope, you see; it was just a plain obsession.

Probably he was doing just that when she slipped away from the hospital. The stepmother had tired of the Riviera and was back home, and on the first day Anne got out of bed a very handsome limousine stopped at the hospital and they bundled her into it.

The head helped her in herself, and Anne's last words were for her please to give her address to nobody.

"Isn't that a bit foolish?" asked the head.

But Anne only shook her head.

There was no explosion when Doctor Raleigh heard she had gone and "there is no address." He wasn't exploding any more. He did his work as well as ever after that, but a little of the excitement had gone out of the hospital day. The nurses missed it; for they thought he was losing his grip.

For ten days or so this strange peace hovered over the hospital. No doors ever slammed. The operating room was busy, but lifeless. And Granduncle Thomas at home was very anxious.

"Liver, probably," thought Granduncle Thomas. "Needs to get a good horse, and ride."

"He's not eating at all," said the old butler to the cook. "He never even touched this squash."

"Set it there and I'll eat it," said the cook. She was a creature of no sentiment whatever.

And in another house, a very fine house, there was a change also.

"I thought you'd come to your senses," said Anne's stepmother. "Now you can come out, as you ought to."

"I'm not coming out, if you don't mind," said Anne.

But the stepmother got in a social secretary, and made ball lists. She was that sort. She just had to have a list around, to be happy. Whenever she came into Anne's rooms she brought a whiff of the best French perfume with her, and she never knew that it sent through Anne a perfectly sickening longing for the smell of the hospital lysol and formaldehyde and soap and all of it, mixed together into something indescribable.

And then one morning Anne's old nurse, who was her maid now, and brushed her hair, and had put away those terrible hospital clothes with a groan of relief—the old nurse awakened with a pain, and it was probably appendicitis.

Anne was scared out of her wits. She had only one person to love her, and that was the old nurse. And it is possible she suggested Rakeigh to the family doctor to operate. She has denied this, but it seems rather likely that she did.

And Raleigh came. He went in and saw the patient, and when he came out, there was Anne in the hall. She looked very lovely, but her voice was queer; naturally enough, the way her heart was going.

"Is it appendicitis?" she said.

"Annel Anne darling!"

"Is is appendicitis?"

"Oh, damn the appendicitis! It's me!" he said, and put his arms around her.

The stepmother came out and found them there. She nearly fell down the stairs, but nobody noticed her.

They claim at the hospital that they knew, before he told anybody. He came stamping in, slamming the big front door behind him, and when the man in Twenty-nine said: "Doctor, this bed is damned uncomfortable," he replied, "I don't give a whoop how the bed feels. How are *you*?" and looked around for approval. Then he went up to the operating room, thud, thud, and howled because the cat-gut was cut too short. And when somebody was slow in handing him something or other he yelled, "What the devil's the matter with this place? Everybody asleep?"

Probably the picture in the head's room was right, and he will always be a violent man. But not to her. Not to her.

THE TRUMPET SOUNDS

Big Joe Allison had shot his wife and cut his own throat. All the Fifth Ward had expected it for some time, except Anna Allison herself. But, then, the ward could have told her some things about Joe that she did not know: his slow quietness and then his occasional violence.

But the ward had not liked Anna, with her bobbed hair and her eyes traveling about looking for admiration. Always like that she was, with her slim legs in silk stockings twinkling along the streets and her challenging look and half smile.

No one was immune from those sly attacks of Anna's.

"Half a dozen eggs," she would say to the grocer, and look up at him from under her lashes. "And don't pick out the bantams. Joe's hollow all the way."

"Head and all, eh?"

"Oh, his head's solid enough," she would say, and laugh a little contemptuously. It was not long before all the ward knew that she had married Joe for reasons of her own, but that those reasons had nothing to do with love.

Mrs. Harrison, who lived above the poolroom across the street, sized her up quickly. "If you ask me," she said, "she's a hussy. And the sooner Joe finds it out the better."

But Anna was too shrewd for that. Joe would come home to a tidy flat, with Anna moving daintily about, and after the supper things were cleaned up he would take her on his knee and sit for a while, content just to hold her.

And Anna would submit. She had a way of running her hand up his sleeve and stroking his great arm, covered with strong, dark hair. "Are you still crazy about me, Joe?"

"You bet I am."

He paid her without question the tributes her vanity demanded. He saw in the tidy flat not a setting for Anna herself but a welcome home to a tired man; thought her fastidious care of her small body was to make it attractive to him, and without being conscious of it felt in her coolness and lack of passion a safeguard.

He did not know that vanity leads more women astray than love.

On Sunday mornings he crept out of bed and went to early mass without disturbing her. Anna had been a Protestant before her marriage, but she had changed her faith as easily as she had changed

her name, and after a time Joe had given up trying to make a good Catholic of her.

"Now listen, boy," she would say. "I don't care about those things. They were left out of me, somehow. And I'll take what's coming to me in the next world. I'll be a sport all right when the time comes."

That was a favorite expression of hers. Being a sport was the nearest she had to a creed.

Now and then Father Murphy would meet her on the street. A big man was Father Murphy, corpulent and hoary, and an untidy man too for all his holiness. The very spots on his clothing endeared him to a district which could understand the slovenliness of a womanless man better than the preening daintiness of a married Anna. And when Father Murphy met Anna, on Wheeler Street it might be, or on the avenue by the church, Anna would dodge by if she could. When she could not she would stop and inspect him with cool appraisal. Not a spot missed her eyes. And when she finally looked up into his face it would be with a half smile, cynical and suspicious.

When Joe told her of the holiness and austerity of his life she openly sneered.

"Don't you believe it," she said. "He's a *man*, isn't he? I wouldn't trust him around the corner."

And Father Murphy, after a call or two, gave up

going to see her. It was not only that she used most of the tricks she knew on him; it was because he felt that behind that young and slightly smiling face there was a wall of hardness that could not be broken down.

But Anna worried him. He began to see her on street corners talking to men, a little flushed, a trifle daring, and Joe off at work at the time. And there came a day when Joe went to see Father Murphy, sitting uncomfortably in the bare parlor and holding his hat on his knees, and asked for a little advice.

"She's young," he said, "and she means no harm. But she likes to play a bit, and people will begin to talk soon."

Father Murphy did the best he could, and in the end Joe carried back with him a holy medal, which Anna laughed at and refused to wear. But the matter preyed on the father's mind. He could reach the generation he understood; not a domestic trouble in the ward for years but had been brought to him. But this new generation was beyond him.

One day he stopped at the bookshop on the avenue and carried home a book called, *Practical Talks on Family Life*. He marked some passages, such as: "A woman who dresses without propriety becomes an instrument of Satan," and so on. But how could one speak of propriety to an Anna who

openly scoffed at it, or of Satan to one who feared neither God nor devil?

But as time went on and gossip began to reach him he sent to Anna a summons she dared not disobey.

She went in, defiant and wary, and her skirts were shorter and her stockings thinner than ever before. And Father Murphy saw her, not as she was, but as the product of evil loose in the world, and pityingly put a hand on her shoulder.

"My child," he began. But Anna twitched her shoulder away from him.

"I'll thank you to keep your hands off me," she said, and opening her cheap vanity case with hands that trembled, began to paint her lips.

After that, what could he do? He talked to her—of a wife's duty to her husband and suchlike matters—but she had come armored against him, and never once did he penetrate that armor.

What he did after that it is not easy for a Protestant to understand. He seems to have taken the matter considerably to heart and to have worried more over this one lamb who had gone astray than over the ninety and nine. But Anna went her way, not knowing and not caring. Until the fever came.

How it came nobody knew. It had not visited the Fifth Ward for so long that it found a quarter totally unprepared. And it spread like an evil wind,

knocking down here a man, there a woman, again a child. In the red brick hospital around the corner on the avenue the beds were filled in no time, and cots were spread down the center of the wards.

The odor of fever hung over these wards, heavy and fetid. It moved in the flutter of nurses' skirts or to the opening of windows, only to settle again like a germ-laden fog, under which lips dried and bodies twisted and fingers picked at counterpanes.

Screens were moved about, and from behind them came the sickly sweetness of alcohol baths. Feeding cups sat on bedside stands, yellowish rins of dried milk within them. Probationers went around cleansing cracked and dried mouths with glycerine and myrrh, and up in the mortuary lay rows of sheeted bodies, neatly washed, each with the hands devoutly crossed and the jaw tied up with a bandage.

The mortuary was built like a chapel, and when the early morning sunlight flickered in through the windows, which had been covered with colored paper to look like stained glass, it gave an appearance of life to the still faces. Like a resurrection.

Father Murphy was in and out of the hospital at all hours with his shabby black bag. The nurses would place a screen around the bed and a clean towel on the bedside stand, and there Father Murphy would lay out what was essential. And

sometimes after he had administered the sacrament he would follow the little procession to the mortuary and stay there to pray. He would wait outside until the nurses had finished and then ask humbly for admission.

"If I am not in the way, my child."

They were all his children: the nurses, the quick and the dead.

He slept but little, and what with work and fasting and prayer Joe and Anna somehow receded into the back of his mind. When Lent began, on Ash Wednesday, in his purple cope he blessed the ashes.

"Remember, man, that thou art dust! Scarcely does life begin when death approaches."

And the church seemed to be filled with grief.

"Look death in the face, and thou shalt not sin."

And once more the wave of woe and desolation, for the Fifth Ward knew it had sinned and that now indeed it looked death in the face.

Joe was there, but Anna, of course, was not.

Time went on. Father Murphy grew thin; his coat hung almost straight in front, and his ruddy cheeks dropped in two dewlaps over his collar. One night, going down Walter's Alley, he heard a faint tapping on the glass of Aaron Kahn's tailor shop—"Ladies' and Gents' Repairing and Pressing"—and breaking in the door himself carried the stricken little Jew to the hospital.

knocking down here a man, there a woman, again a child. In the red brick hospital around the corner on the avenue the beds were filled in no time, and cots were spread down the center of the wards.

The odor of fever hung over these wards, heavy and fetid. It moved in the flutter of nurses' skirts or to the opening of windows, only to settle again like a germ-laden fog, under which lips dried and bodies twisted and fingers picked at counterpanes.

Screens were moved about, and from behind them came the sickly sweetness of alcohol baths. Feeding cups sat on bedside stands, yellowish rims of dried milk within them. Probationers went around cleansing cracked and dried mouths with glycerine and myrrh, and up in the mortuary lay rows of sheeted bodies, neatly washed, each with the hands devoutly crossed and the jaw tied up with a bandage.

The mortuary was built like a chapel, and when the early morning sunlight flickered in through the windows, which had been covered with colored paper to look like stained glass, it gave an appearance of life to the still faces. Like a resurrection.

Father Murphy was in and out of the hospital at all hours with his shabby black bag. The nurses would place a screen around the bed and a clean towel on the bedside stand, and there Father Murphy would lay out what was essential. And

sometimes after he had administered the sacrament he would follow the little procession to the mortuary and stay there to pray. He would wait outside until the nurses had finished and then ask humbly for admission.

"If I am not in the way, my child."

They were all his children: the nurses, the quick and the dead.

He slept but little, and what with work and fasting and prayer Joe and Anna somehow receded into the back of his mind. When Lent began, on Ash Wednesday, in his purple cope he blessed the ashes.

"Remember, man, that thou art dust! Scarcely does life begin when death approaches."

And the church seemed to be filled with grief.

"Look death in the face, and thou shalt not sin."

And once more the wave of woe and desolation, for the Fifth Ward knew it had sinned and that now indeed it looked death in the face.

Joe was there, but Anna, of course, was not.

Time went on. Father Murphy grew thin; his coat hung almost straight in front, and his ruddy cheeks dropped in two dewlaps over his collar. One night, going down Walter's Alley, he heard a faint tapping on the glass of Aaron Kahn's tailor shop—"Ladies' and Gents' Repairing and Pressing"—and breaking in the door himself carried the stricken little Jew to the hospital.

The night porter was asleep, and they can show you today the marks on the door where Father Murphy kicked it open.

And then one day Joe Allison came to see him again.

The father was sitting still when he entered. He had not felt well for some time, and now his tongue was dried in his head and his eyes were burning in their sockets. But Joe, sitting white-faced across from him, knew neither of those things.

"I guess I'm kinda up against it, Father," said Joe. "It's about Anna I'm speaking."

"I'm sorry to hear that, my son," said Father Murphy, with his tongue clacking against the roof of his mouth. He felt very dizzy. "If she would come to me now, and I'd give her a bit of a talk—"

"It's beyond that," said Joe. "She's got a fellow. I followed her last night when she thought I was working. I haven't been home since. If I go back I'll kill her, Father. I'm afraid to go back."

"I listen to no such talk as that," said Father Murphy sternly and with an effort. "She's young and foolish, but if she has done a wickedness it is no time for her to face her God. You hear me, Joe? I'll go myself." And he tried to get up, but there was a numbness in his legs and he could not move.

"I'll go myself," he said once more, and there was Joe, all clouded in a dark mist and then disappear-

ing altogether. Father Murphy made one more effort, and then collapsed entirely.

Joe stayed around as long as he could. Sprinkled cold water, as one might know he would, got a doctor and later an ambulance, and only faced his own trouble again when Father Murphy was neatly tucked into a hard, smooth bed in Ward C, with a screen around him, because there were no private rooms vacant.

Aaron Kahn was in the next bed.

Joe went home that night. Anna was sitting alone in the dark, and she said nothing when he went in. He turned on the light, and he saw she had been crying, but he did not speak to her. He went into the bedroom and went to bed.

After a long time she came creeping in and lay on the edge far away from him. She did it so quietly that she might not have been there at all, except that the bed trembled when she sobbed. But after a while she moved over to him, and ran her hand up and down his arm. Joe's very soul shook under that touch.

"I'm not bad, Joe," she said. "Honest to God, Joe. I just went in there to Casey's for a minute. I came right out. You ask *him*."

"Him" was the man she had been with.

"Then he saw me. I thought he did."

"No! Honest, Joe, I'm telling the truth. I was scared, Joe. I'm scared now. You act so queer."

"I'm thinking," said Joe, and freed his arm.

They set up some sort of a *modus vivendi* after that. Anna stayed in the flat, but after she had straightened it for the day there was nothing to fill in the time. She hated books. Mostly, according to Mrs. Harrison, she stood at a window and looked down at the street. And when Joe came home at night it was to sit under the chandelier in the tiny parlor and read the papers. But he did not read them; mostly he held the page before him and continued to think.

Twice a week, on visiting days, he went to the hospital and sat behind the screen beside Father Murphy's bed. But the father did not know him. Yet—and here was a strange thing—he kept asking for Joe. Joe and Anna.

"I'm here, Father," Joe would say. "What is it?"

"Joe," he would repeat. "Joe and Anna."

It may be that he had carried that last conscious thought of his over the border with him. Or it may be—but who are we to deal in such matters?

And when Joe had gone he would still ask for him.

Except for that the father was fairly quiet. Aaron Kahn, reporting on the matter later, says that he mostly thought he was a boy again in Ireland and

that the stars outside the window over his head were shining down on Iar Connacht and twinkling on Wicklow Woods.

And also that on one very clear night he sat up in his bed and said: "He is born, my children," thinking perhaps that the stars were the Christmas candles shining in the windows of Ireland, to guide the Christ child to each cabin and home. That seems probable, because when a wind came up and closed the door of the ward just after that he heard it and began to whimper. Strange to think of Father Murphy whimpering!

* "They cannot come in," he said, with his dried tongue. "The Mother and Child are abroad to-night, and ye have closed the door."

One sees how far he was beyond Joe's reach when on visiting days he sat by the bed with his trouble, and the father babbled on. It was as though the only hand Joe could hold to had drawn itself away.

"Don't you know me, Father?"

"Aroon, aroon, Soggarth aroon," would mutter Father Murphy, back in the past and out of reach entirely.

And so things were when there came a day when Joe, reporting for work, was laid off indefinitely, and when he went home at noon to find the bed unmade, the breakfast dishes still in the sink and Anna out.

He went across the street and took up a position in the window of the pool parlor, and he drank some bootleg whisky when it was offered to him. He had had nothing to drink since his marriage, and it destroyed the last inhibition in him, although on the surface he was cool enough.

At four o'clock he saw Anna slipping home. He gave her an hour and then went back; the place was in order by that time, and Anna said she had not been out all day.

Joe caught her by the arms and shook her.

"Look up at me," he said. "Look up at me and repeat that lie."

And when she could not he got his old army revolver from a table drawer and shot her with the last bullet in it. Then he saw what he had done, and he tried to shoot himself. But the hammer came down with a futile click, and there was Joe still alive, and Anna on the floor.

It was then that he cut his throat.

What matters here, however, is what Aaron Kahn has to say about the matter. For at five o'clock by the C Ward clock, which is the time the Wilkins family in the flat below heard the shot, Aaron says that Father Murphy suddenly roused out of a stupor and sat up in his bed.

"What was that?" he said in a sharp tone.

Aaron, who was convalescing, leaned over and drew aside the loose muslin of the screen.

"It's all right, Father," he said. "Lie down or they'll be putting the bandages on you again."

The bandages, Aaron explains, were to hold Father Murphy in his bed because when he thought he was a boy again he would get out of it.

"'Tis Joe!" said the father, staring straight ahead of him. "Joe and Anna, his wife. May God have mercy on their souls!"

From that moment Aaron knew, he says, that something was wrong between Joe Allison and Anna.

Fifteen minutes later the bell of the patrol wagon was heard ringing furiously outside, and, still with the thought of Joe and Anna in his mind, Aaron sent the McNamara boy, who was able to get about, to inquire.

"Go and find out," he said. "The father here is worrying. See who came in."

So the McNamara boy, nothing loath, wandered down the corridor. At last he saw a policeman from the station house near by on guard outside a door and sitting on a radiator.

"And what's brought you here, Mister O'Leary?" said the McNamara boy. "God knows, 'tis here a fellow should be safe from the law, if anywhere."

"It's the truth," said O'Leary. "And when the

Fifth Ward learns that, maybe a peaceful man like meself can have some rest."

The McNamara boy cocked an inquiring eye at the door.

"Is that so?" he said. "And you'll be claiming now that it's one of us in there at this minute, maybe."

"I'm not saying."

"Come on and tell me," said the McNamara boy, beginning to wheedle. "Come on, now! Who is it, and what's their trouble?"

O'Leary grinned and weakened.

"I *might* do that thing," he agreed, "if a smart boy like yourself knows of a spot handy where a man can take a puff of a cigarette without a nurse smacking it out of his face."

The news spread like wildfire through the hospital that evening. Joe Allison had shot his wife and cut his own throat.

But at Aaron Kahn's bed it stopped. Not by so much as a whisper did Aaron let that dire news penetrate beyond the screen. Yet all that evening the father groaned like a soul in purgatory and gave answer to unheard questions. It was, C Ward says, as though the holy angels had brought him the matter and laid it before him.

"Awake, Father Murphy, for there is trouble to-

day. Joe Allison has shot his wife, Anna, and cut his own throat."

"And what shall I be doing then? I am a sick man, and my legs tremble under me if I stand."

"Go and save them," maybe they said, for he would reply, "Aye, Lord, I come," and try to get out of his bed. Aaron had to put him back over and over for fear the nurses would bring the bandages. . . .

They had taken Joe and Anna to the emergency ward.

The first thing the nurse on duty there had known of the tragedy was when she heard outside in the hall the familiar shuffling of feet. All policemen know how to carry stretchers and not to keep step.

So she had just time to whisk the white counterpanes off the two beds, leaving their gray wooden blinkers ready, and the flat hard pillow with its rubber cover under the slip, when they were brought in.

She knew immediately that this was no ordinary case, for the patrolmen dumped Joe on his bed without ceremony. Not that Joe was conscious, but still—there it was. And by the different manner in which they lifted Anna to hers, although it made no difference to Anna either just then.

"Don't bother about *him*," one of them said.

"Here's where your work is, Sister. She's pretty bad, I'm thinking."

And Anna was indeed "pretty bad," although Joe was nothing to write home about either. Finally the policemen went away, taking their rolled-up stretchers with them, and for some time there they lay, the two of them, side by side. They might almost have been in their bed at home. Even then Anna was appealing, and it seems rather a pity she could not have seen the admiration she was arousing. But nobody paid any particular attention to Joe, except an interne who was new and enthusiastic, and O'Leary, who was feeling sick like, but who couldn't leave. O'Leary's job was to see that Joe did not escape the gallows by dying prematurely.

"I'll hang around a while," he said. "If the girl says anything, you might call me; I'll be outside."

He did not include Joe, it being clear that Joe would not say anything at all for a long time.

So O'Leary went outside for a breath of air, and inside the emergency room the interne cut Joe's sleeve open to give him a hypodermic. And Joe roused and thought it was Anna, touching his arm as she used to. What with one thing and another, the slate of his mind was wiped clean of the last few weeks, and so he reached up and patted her hand, his eyes closed.

"Y' all right, honcy?" he tried to say. But of course he could not speak.

After a while they separated them, Anna to a woman's ward, where, like Father Murphy, she was screened off. But hospitals use screens in several ways, and so these were for Anna to die behind. And Joe to the operating room to be saved for the law.

And back in their flat Mrs. Harrison and the woman from the apartment beneath straightened things up, all very neat and nice. Indeed, there are some who say that it was Mrs. Harrison who did away with Joe's revolver, carrying it across the street in the leg of her stocking. One thing is certain: there was no revolver there when the officers came to examine the flat. True, she never blinked an eye when she was accused of it, and was willing to swear on a stack of Bibles a foot high that she had not seen it. But the ward suspects her.

However, it did not look as though that or anything else would save Joe if Anna died.

All that was on Wednesday.

The end of Lent was approaching. Already the drug store at the corner of Wheeler Street and Walter's Alley was selling envelopes of egg dyes, and in the windows of some of the houses were bowls of them, red and yellow and blue. All colors.

Wagons came into the market square at dawn each morning and set out on the pavements their lilies and their hyacinths, their tulips and narcissuses, carefully wrapped against the early cold. When the sun rose high enough they were uncovered, and then the children who had been sewed into their flannels at the first frost ran home to be cut out of them.

"It's warm, like summer," they pleaded. "And the flowers are out."

The Fifth Ward saw few flowers except at Easter.

But there was little real joy in the ward, what with the fever and all. And every day the news from the hospital was poor.

"Have you heard how's the father today?"

"He's getting weaker, they're saying."

When on top of that came the tragedy of Joe and Anna, a wave of superstitious terror passed over the district. Sure, then, and the powers of darkness must be loose among them. And there were still three days to go. Three days until the feast of feasts and the end of sorrow and penance. Three days until Easter.

That Wednesday night many of the people made a pilgrimage downtown to the cathedral to pray. It seemed to them that God was perhaps more likely

to be there, seeing that their own church was as it was and the ward very likely in disrepute above.

When they got there they slipped in very humbly. And when, during the service, the organ sank into hopeless grief and the candles were extinguished one by one, it seemed to them they could not bear it. At last only one candle remained, and when it had been taken behind the altar and hidden there, it seemed as though their hearts would break.

The Light of the World had gone out. Come back, O Light of the World, and bring us hope again, and peace and mercy.

They waited breathlessly. The church was very still, and then the light returned once more.

Joe lay that night in his bed in the men's surgical ward. He had to breathe through a tube in his throat, and sometimes the tube filled up. Then the sound of Joe's breathing filled the room.

He had no time to think. All he could do was to get air into his lungs and then get it out again. Breathe. Let it out. Breathe. Let it out. All day and all night.

But he was conscious. If a man might die by holding his breath, he would have died. But he could not; he who so wished to die must make his fight for life. Breathe. Let it out. Breathe. Let it out. Oh, God!

The men around him could not sleep. When the

nurse came in to clean the tube they muttered their protests or sat up to slap and turn viciously their crumpled pillows.

Joe dared not sleep. Hardly he dared to close his eyes. Air. Air. Open the windows. God, open the windows!

Anna, on the other hand, was quite comfortable. She was not greatly interested in where she was or why she was there. All she wanted was to look at the dirty gray of the ceiling overhead or at the white muslin of her screens and to be let alone.

But something would not let her alone. This something was a voice, and just when she was most comfortable it insisted on asking her a question.

"Was it Joe? Was it Joe? Was it Joe?" It said it over and over.

When it became really annoying, all easy as she was, she turned her head, and there was a man with a notebok beside her.

"Was it Joe?" he said again.

"Was what Joe?"

"Who shot you?"

Ah, that was it; she had known there was something, but she had forgotten it in this new peace. Joe had shot her, and now maybe she was going to— She put that away. It was unpleasant.

"What about Joe?" she asked slowly.

"It was Joe did this, wasn't it?"

So that was it too! The dirty dog, trying to make trouble! What had happened was her business and Joe's and for nobody else. There was a queer, mocking look in the eyes she turned on the officer.

"You'd like to know, wouldn't you!" she scoffed in a whisper.

"We know all right."

"Then get out of here and quit bothering me. I want to sleep."

"But it *was* Joe, wasn't it?"

"Oh, get the hell out of here," said Anna wearily. "If you want to know, I did it myself. Take that away and dream on it!" And when he sat back and snapped his notebook shut she smiled faintly. "I did it myself, with my—little hatchet," she added breathlessly.

Just before two o'clock the man went away defeated, and the nurse came in and took a look at Anna. Then she went out again and looked at Anna's card: "Sex, female; color, white; age, twenty; religion, R. C."

"Roman Catholic," she reflected. "I'd better get a priest."

But when she proposed this to Anna she only shook her head.

"What's the use?" she said, without bitterness. "I'll take—I'll take what's coming to me." And lapsed into her comfortable stupor again.

But Aaron Kahn insists that she had a priest that night, and that the priest was Father Murphy. And it is well known that the nurses found a rosary in her hands. They tried to take it away, so they could work around her better, but she would not let it go.

In every hospital there are periods of ebb and full tide.

The full tide is at four or so in the afternoon; the ebb begins after midnight, when vitality grows low and resistance weakens. It is then that the temperature charts, which have perhaps been showing high points like the peaks of a mountain range, suddenly begin to go down into the Valley of the Shadow. The line slants; it gets to the safety point, but it does not stop there. It goes down and down—and then perhaps it ceases.

So even at the beginning of the ebb tide that night Father Murphy was very weak. He lay in his bed and looked out at the stars as they used to shine down on Iar Connacht or twinkle on Wicklow Woods, but this time they seemed different to him.

He appeared to think that they were the lights on an altar. And of course so they may be, but who are we to say?

But after a time a fog came up and one by one the stars went out until only one was left. All of C Ward heard him groan when that last star was extinguished and speak despairingly aloud:

"The Light of the World has gone out. And I am a worm and no man; the reproach of men and the outcast of people."

But only Aaron the Jew knew that from that moment he lay waiting for its return again or was aware of the great sigh of relief he gave when it came.

"Now have mercy and hope returned to the world," said Father Murphy sonorously, "and I must go about my Father's business."

Aaron heard a soft movement behind the screen and knew what it portended. He stuck his feet into his old slippers and got up, but he was too late. Father Murphy was standing beside his bed, swaying slightly, and the next minute he was pushing past Aaron and out into the ward.

"Y'understand," Aaron says, in telling the story, "if I let him go and the nurse finds it out, I get hell, see? So I ain't taking no chances."

So Aaron caught him by the arm and tried to hold him, but the father shook him off. He seemed amazingly strong all at once. He went straight down the ward and out of the door—just as he was, night garments and bare feet and all. Aaron was frightened almost out of his wits, but he did the best he could—flung a blanket around his shoulders and caught up another for the father, and then followed him into the hall.

For what came after we have only Aaron's word. It seems fairly incredible that those two, Aaron, the Jew, and the priest, could have made their excursion unseen. Yet there is certain evidence to uphold it; for example, Aaron speaks of the odor of boiling coffee in one of the halls. He always says: "They were cooking coffee, you know," and then looks around, as if to a situation he cannot somehow make real—the coffee is the one real thing to which he clings.

But the coffee for the night nurses' supper is cooked far from C Ward, in the women's wing.

Still, there are some things which Aaron may have added later; that about the restless men growing quiet in C Ward as the father passed through it is one; and another is about that stop at the door of Joe's ward, and the father's lifted hand and the word "Peace." At which Joe's breathing grew quieter, and he slept.

But, however that may be, it seems certain that Father Murphy got to Anna Allison that night, and that there he wrestled for some time with the devil for the prize of Anna's obstinate, unshriven little soul. How long he stayed we do not know. Aaron, left at the door of the ward, says it was long enough, what with one thing and another.

"And me in my night-shirt, y'understand," he

says plaintively. "Twice I had to hide in a bathroom, and I guess I should maybe kiss myself good-by, if they caught me there, eh? I'm telling you!"

However, nobody found him, and finally Father Murphy came back along the darkened ward. He was apparently still quite strong and full of life, and together they made that strange return journey of theirs, during which the father paused only once, and then at a window. He stood there looking out, and then he said, like a man pleading:

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! Return to the Lord thy God."

Then he went on, and in the morning he was dead.

Nobody had told Joe whether Anna lived or not, and at first it made no difference, because he was not thinking. But after the first few hours he began to think, and then every time the nurse came to clean out the tube he formed the word with his lips.

"Anna," he would try to say. "Anna?"

But the nurse would only shake her head.

"You mustn't try to talk," she would say.

By the second day he could look around the room, with eyes haunted by deadly terror. Anna? Had he killed Anna? But no one replied to that look. No one, indeed, came near him. The small services of

the ward were not for him, nor its kindnesses. In his dragging carpet slippers, on crutches or in wheeled chairs, the ward passed and repassed his bed; it stared and commented. But it avoided him.

He made signals to them, and they ignored him. But finally, on the second day that was, a boy came and stood beside the bed.

"What is it you want?" he asked. "Nurse? Orderly?"

"My wife?" said Joe with his lips, and staring up with his tortured eyes. "Is she alive?"

"Here, Karl," called the boy across the ward. "Lend us your pencil. Maybe he can write it."

But Karl raised himself in his bed and glowered across at Joe.

"I lend no pencil to a murderer," he snarled, and lay back again.

So sure was Joe then that Anna was gone that it made little difference to him after that when he saw the ward humorist gesturing toward his bed and then strangling himself with his hands as with a rope.

It was the same officer who had approached Anna who got his confession from him. Joe offered no difficulties; he nodded "yes" to the questions and even feebly scrawled his name to the paper he was offered.

Then, as if there was still a flicker of hope in him, he tried to write his desperate query beneath his signature. But the pencil fell out of his fingers, and for the first and only time Joe wept.

He lay there, helpless as a baby, and great tears rolled down his cheeks. The officer thought he was weeping for himself!

Good Friday by that time, and the Fifth Ward in double mourning; the shades in Father Murphy's little house drawn, and by afternoon the people flocking to the church, where no lights burned on the altar and hope seemed gone indeed.

Up on one aisle and down the other they went to see Father Murphy lying in state in his church. And outside on the pavement a tale was whispered about, that Aaron the Jew had told: of how he had risen from his bed to save the soul of Anna Allison and had paid this price for that soul.

"He was a good man and holy," they said. "And he died for that strumpet. Evil she came, and evil may she go."

They hoped that she would die.

But Father Murphy lay, very comfortable and majestic, in the light of the candles. Like a man who has earned his rest!

With Saturday, however, things began to brighten up a little. The father, after all, had not been young, and he had died full of good works and saintliness.

Little pots of flowers began to come into the hospital, to be distributed in the wards, and the voices of the choir boys at the Episcopal Mission, practicing their Easter anthem, floated in at the open windows.

It was warm, too, and sunny. When the men came along the streets outside to clear the fire plugs of their winter deposit of mud, the children took off their shoes and stockings and splashed in the gutters.

But best of all, the fever was receding. The night nurses at the hospital no longer came off duty exhausted to drag themselves to their beds; there was time properly to clean the feeding cups, to put in order the medicine closets, to fold and tidy the sheets.

The long, sad season was over. Soon could the world arise from its knees and go about its business.

All but Joe and Anna, his wife.

Anna was never out of Joe's thoughts; never did the nurse rouse him with a touch on the arm that he did not think it was Anna, and never did he come to full consciousness without dying a thousand deaths of remorse. He had loved her terribly. He knew now that, good or bad as she might have been, he still loved her.

And somehow he saw, too, in that new clairvoyance of his, that she had loved him. How far

she had wandered he did not know; it seemed now not to matter. She had come back to him a little frightened, perhaps wary and defiant, but she had come back.

She had come back, and he had killed her.

Anna, Anna!

Anna knew that she was dying. There was no deceiving her. She watched the nurses' faces with eyes that, if sunken, were still shrewd.

"Am I—bad?"

"You're doing fine."

"You're—lying to me."

They had not told her about Joe. But on Holy Saturday toward evening she asked for him.

"I'd like to see Joe," she said.

"Well, maybe we can arrange that later," said the nurse briskly, and looked away. "But you'd better rest now."

"I'd like to tell him—something."

"Can't you tell me?"

"No."

She lay still and closed her eyes, but her mind was evidently busy, for a little later she called the nurse back.

"I guess—I'd better not see him—after all," she said, with that new breathlessness which had bothered her all day.

She had been thinking it over, you see, and of course she could not see Joe. He would give it all away, and then the law would get him. After that she spoke only once that evening. Then she muttered something about being a sport, but the nurse did not get it.

She began to sink after that. The line on the chart on the nurse's desk outside began to drop at nine o'clock; Anna's face was cold and pinched, and her hands were clammy. But she still held to the rosary; it was, in a sense, all she had to cling to.

She felt lonely, dying there like that, but she did not fool herself. She had deserved it. She had had Joe, and she had thrown him away. He hated her or he would be with her now. It had never entered her sick mind that Joe might not be able to come to her.

All she knew was that she wanted him and he was not there.

Toward midnight an interne came and gave her a hypodermic, and the touch of his strong hands roused her.

"Honest to God, Joe!" she muttered. "I only went—"

It looked then as though Anna, rosary and all, was going to die with a lie on her lips.

At midnight some Negroes passed along the street

below. Their soft voices rose, plaintive, beseeching and sad:

*"Tain't my mother or my father,
But it's me, O Lord,
Standin' in the need of prayer.
It's me, it's me, it's me, O Lord,
An' I'm standin' in the need of prayer. . . ."*

But Anna did not hear them.

So was Easter ushered into the Fifth Ward that night, with things as to Joe and Anna about as bad as they could be; with joy tempered with sorrow in the houses, the larders filled, the alarm clocks set for the early mass; with Father Murphy lying in his church in the candlelight, and a guard of honor to watch by him; and with Aaron the Jew, to whom it was not Easter Eve at all but Saturday night, sleepless in his bed and low in his mind.

And it is from Aaron the Jew that we must construct the rest of the story.

Briefly, Aaron says that he was lying in his bed, awake, and Father Murphy's bed was empty and neat and square beside him. Aaron was wide awake, and he cites the Negroes' singing as a proof of it:

*"It's me, it's me, it's me, O Lord,
I'm standin' in the need of prayer."*

Then, Aaron says, all at once there was the heavy fragrance of flowers in the air, such as filled the church that night, and mixed in with it was the odor of incense—although how Aaron recognized the incense it is not for us to know.

He sat up in his bed, and all was as it had been. The McNamara boy was snoring, and somebody down the ward rapped on his stand with his tin cup. Which everybody knows is a signal to the nurse outside for water.

So Aaron lay down again, and turned so he faced that empty bed in the dark corner. And the corner was not dark, nor was the bed empty.

Father Murphy was in the bed, just as if—well, just as if nothing had happened. Only he looked very peaceful and quiet, and his hands were crossed on his breast and held a crucifix. Aaron saw him plainly, because there was a Light.

"What sort of a light? Candles?"

"Well, maybe. I ain't sure. But there was a light, though. I seen it. But maybe it came from the star."

"What star?"

"The star he was always looking at," he explains patiently. "The one he called the Light of the World."

However all that may be, it is what followed that

matters. For Aaron says that while he looked at him Father Murphy sat up in his bed, and first he glanced out of the window and then he looked at Aaron and spoke.

"He is risen," he said, and looked at Aaron as if daring him to deny it. But Aaron did not. Instead he said in a trembling voice—and how the words came to him he does not know:

"He is risen indeed."

The father seemed to be relieved at that answer and was quiet for a moment or so, according to Aaron. Then he said:

"I have gone away and left my work undone, and my soul has no rest. Arise you, Aaron, and go to Anna Allison. Lay your hands on her wound and say to her that she must not die or evil will come of it."

"Now?" said Aaron, shaking.

"Now," said the father.

So Aaron got up and drew on his old hospital trousers—he had been promoted, as one may say, to trousers by that time—and stuck his feet in his slippers. But he would not turn his back to that bed next to his or to what it contained.

When he was ready to go he looked at the father again. He was still much as he had been, but not so clear to be seen. "Fading" is Aaron's word for

it, and it is as good as any. And he spoke once more, but very faintly now.

"Go to Joe also," he said, "and tell him that Anna—"

He never finished it, because just then the Negroes outside started to sing again:

*"My Lord, he calls me,
He calls me by the thunder,
The trumpet sounds within—my soul."*

And there was Aaron, standing in his trousers and slippers beside the bed in the corner and nothing in it at all.

Aaron felt very odd, like a man rudely awakened from a sleep—as of course he may have been. His first impulse was to go back to his couch and do nothing.

"My knees were like water," he says, and adds: "And the bed was smooth, you know." He looks at one wistfully when he says this; it is to explain his moment of weakness.

But in the end he decided to go.

He had far more trouble than the two of them had had before. At one time he dodged into a closet and some pans fell down with a fearful crash; and again he only escaped the night watchman by getting out on a fire escape. But in the end he got to Anna's ward and slid inside.

He knew where to go well enough, but there was a woman awake and moving about in it and a nurse with Anna herself. It looked bad, and if the nurse had not gone out it might have been hopeless.

But she went out (it was to write "Pulse indistinguishable" on Anna's record, as a matter of fact) and so Aaron finally got in.

"Anna," he said. "Anna!"

She looked up at him, and once more she thought it was Joe.

"I'm glad you've come," she said in her half whisper. "I never blamed you. I—"

"Now see here, Anna," Aaron said in a business-like tone. "You've gotta get well. Don't you know that?"

Well, she saw then that it was not Joe, and she turned sulky.

"I don't want to," she said. "Go away—and let me alone."

"All right," said Aaron, "if that's the way you feel about it. Let Joe hang. It's not my business."

"Hang?" said Anna. "What do you mean—hang? It's—my fault, isn't it?"

"But I told them—"

"The law should think of that!"

"Forget it," said Aaron. "They've got the goods on him. You better get well, and be quick about it."

Then some recollection seems to have come to

him that he had twisted his message somewhat and forgotten a part of it. For he put his hands, awkwardly one may be sure, on her bandaged body and held them there for a minute.

"You get well, girl," he said. "You're all right, and we're for you, y'understand?"

And Anna nodded submissively, as if indeed she did.

Having thus completed, if somewhat crudely, his apostolic mission, Aaron went away again. Not far, however, for he was discovered outside the ward door, and the next morning, Easter, he was sent home. They brought him his clothes tied up in a wrinkled bundle and got from the office his two dollars and ten cents in money, and turned him out.

But he had saved Anna Allison, and through her he had saved Joe.

The ward let him alone that Easter Day, save for some little boys who threw stones at his window because it was Easter and Aaron was a Jew. And Aaron feebly swept up the broken glass and made no protest.

That afternoon, however, he pressed his clothes and ventured back to the hospital, feebly, as befitted his condition, but sturdily as befitted his purpose, to see Joe.

"How're you feeling?" he asked. "Better? Well, that's all right."

He was filled with great thoughts, but in the unfriendly eyes of the surgical ward he stood awkward and uncomfortable.

"Treatin' you pretty good?"

But Joe did not answer. He was trying to say something. Aaron leaned down over the bed and studied his lips, and it was Aaron who understood.

"Anna?" he said. "Well, they're kinda tight down in the office, but I was talkin' by the doctor himself. She's better today. She's doin' good. You just forget it and get well."

Life goes on much as usual in the Fifth Ward. They still sell bad liquor in the shed behind the poolroom, and the new priest who has taken Father Murphy's place cannot stop it. And Anna still goes up and down Wheeler Street, her slim legs in silk stockings and her eyes glancing about for admiration.

Not at once do you change the Annals of the world.

But she no longer stops at the corners, a little flushed, a trifle daring, to talk to the men gathered there. The men are afraid, for one thing, and perhaps so is Anna. When Joe comes home at night she crawls on his lap, and Joe holds her there.

"Are you still crazy about me, Joe?"

"You bet I am," he says. But he has to free one hand to say it, for Joe still has to cover the end of his tube before he can speak.

The ward has never quite believed Aaron's story. Mostly they think he slept and dreamed it, for the guard of honor that night at the church says his reverence never moved during the night, and all was as it should be.

Only one man says different, and he speaks of a cold wind at midnight, but perhaps somebody had opened a door. But two things bear him out. The fever began to die that night and has not come back again; and there is the matter of O'Leary the policeman, last Easter Eve.

And a hard-headed man is O'Leary.

It was like this:

O'Leary was gunshoeing down Walter's Alley looking for bootleggers when what should he hear but a strange sound from Aaron's shop, "Ladies' and Gents' Pressing and Repairing."

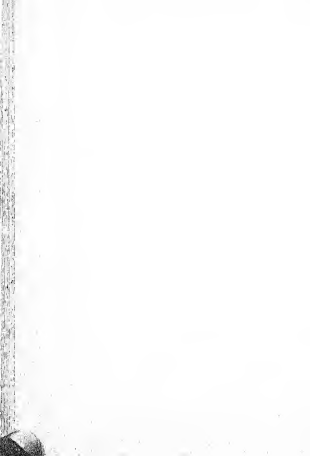
O'Leary stopped to listen, and there it was: Tap-tap-tap.

So O'Leary, who is a bold man, walked on his rubber heels to Aaron's shop and tried the door, and as it was open he went in. And what should be there but Aaron, curled up in the window place

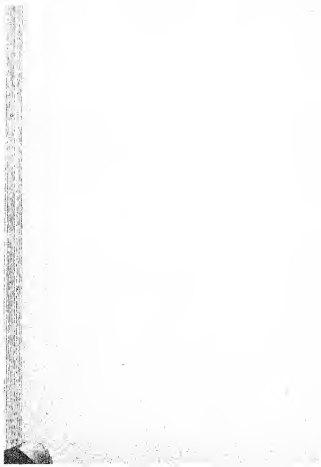
and tapping on the glass! Tap-tap-tap, tap-tap-tapping away for dear life.

It was dark in there, so Aaron never saw O'Leary until he was inside. And it was then that Aaron gave a sort of cry and stretched out his arms like a man who has waited long and hungrily.

"I knew you would come again, Father," he said, and dropped in a faint.



OF YOUTH
His Letters



HIS LETTERS

The boy was reading his letters. The sharp bustle of departure was over, and the ship had scudded down to such quiet as is possible with four thousand young voices aboard, four thousand pairs of army-issue shoes, eighteen mascots of noise-producing varieties, and a fog over the bay.

There had been a sick feeling in what the boy would have said was his stomach, when the dim outlines of the city faded into that early morning haze. He had cheered and waved his hat at the Goddess of Liberty, along with the others, and in a restrained voice, along the rail, he had sung in a bass newly acquired and very, very deep, "Good-by, Broadway, Hello, France!"

The singing had cheered him. He had been hanging over the stern, but now he wandered forward.

Then he remembered his letters. There were four. He found a sheltered spot and sat down to read them. One was in an old hand, feeble and shaken. The capitals were made with tiny flourishes, and at the top of each sheet was the mark of a pin, where had been fastened underneath a sheet of lines, to show through and keep the writing straight.

The second was from his mother. It was a broad, firm script, on heavy paper. He rather thought there might be a check in it. Over the third he was puzzled; then his face cleared.

"Aunt Fanny!" he said. "Good old girl!"

He kept the fourth for the last. It was in an unformed girlish hand, written with a stub pen, and it was rather fat and heavy. He held it for a moment before he slipped it back into the pocket of his blouse.

He read his grandmother's letter first.

"My dear Grandson," it said. "It is a long time since I have written any letters. Your Aunt Fanny does my writing for me. But now that you are going away to fight, I must send you my blessing and good-by. It is strongly borne in on me that I shall not be here when you come back. You must not feel badly about that, if it is God's will that I am taken before long. I have lived my time, and more. I have had much happiness, and so many that I have loved are waiting for me on the other side that my going to them will be a great joy.

"I have knitted you six pairs of socks, and I have sent you also the Testament your grandfather carried through the Civil War. It was returned to me when he died at Appomattox, along with his watch. As my eldest grandchild, this watch will be yours some day.

"As I sit here on this quiet Sabbath day, my thoughts go back, as the thoughts of the old always do, to the past. I see your grandfather's face when the news came that war was declared against the Southern Confederacy. He was uncertain what to do. Your father was a baby then, and I was not very strong. How strange it must seem to him, waiting over there, that I have been so long in coming to him.

"At first it did not seem possible for him to leave us. Then, on a Sabbath day very like this one, we went to church together, and the clergyman announced that he had found his duty lay with the colors. One by one the men in the congregation rose and joined him.

"The memories of the old are strange. I have forgotten so much since then. But I remember everything of that day—your father, asleep on my arm, and your grandfather's face, white and set. Then I saw him take up his Testament, and open it at random, and sit with it in his hand, thinking.

"He passed it over to me, and his finger was on the verse his eyes had found to lead him. You will find the page marked by your father's picture. 'What doth it profit, my brethren, if a man say he hath faith, but hath not works? Can that faith save him?'

"He gave me the Book, and he put his hand for

a moment on your father's head. Then he stood up and said: 'I am ready to go.'

"Your father carried the Testament through the Spanish War, and now you are to carry it to France. I shall have a splendid story to tell when I join them all on the other side. My only regret is that you have no son. I should like to feel, before I go, that the fighting traditions of the family are to be carried down for other generations to come.

"The old see many things. They see that there are things better worth while than length of years, and that all that is worth living for may be crowded into a few short days. They see that life itself is nothing, and that what counts is duty and achievement. And they have learned, at the cost of much sorrow, that we are all in the hands of a greater power to use as He wills.

"The peace of God be and abide with you always."

"Poor old grandmother!" said the boy, inarticulately. He folded the letter and laid it beside him. He would have to hunt up that Testament and look at it. Pretty fine old chap, his grandfather. Those old guys had good stuff in 'em. Sword in one hand and Bible in the other!

He drew himself up a little. A fellow had to carry on the traditions of his family. Well, he hoped he'd do his bit when the time came.

He read his Aunt Fanny's letter next, with boyish

discrimination—reserving the best for the last. He had a clear picture of his Aunt Fanny in his mind, her thin, erect figure, her graying hair, her austere dress. It had been rather a shame about Aunt Fanny, living with his grandmother for all these years, and taking care of the little old lady with such unstinting devotion.

He had seen her once or twice in the early morning, after his grandmother had had a bad night. Once he had met her on the stairway, carrying a little tray. She had looked very elderly and very tired, and he rather thought she had been crying. It had dawned on him then that life was not particularly exciting for her. He had taken the tray from her and put a strong young arm about her thin shoulders.

"Buck up, old girl," he had said. "She's going to live for years and years yet."

And somehow, thinking it over later, he had fancied that he had not greatly comforted her.

He opened Fanny's letter, but he did not read it at once. He had only four, and there was no use hurrying through them. Besides, there was a wrestling bout going on down the deck. He watched it idly. From somewhere below there came, too, an odor of frying bacon. He looked at his wrist-watch and mentally computed the time to mess. He sighed.

"Dear Francis," said Aunt Fanny's letter. "I am

not exactly in the right mood to write you. But I must, if you are to get this in time. I have sent a dozen pairs of socks to your mother for you, and I'd be glad to know if the sweater is open enough at the neck to go over your head easily. Try to work it on slowly at first, so you don't stretch it too much.

"Think of your being a soldier! It is no time at all since I knitted little booties for you, so small that they were ridiculous! And now I am ashamed to show the size of the socks you require! Let me know if you need more, or if you know any boys who need them. It is all an old maid like myself can do in this war—knit for other women's children.

"I wonder sometimes if your mother knows how I envy her? She has something to give. I have nothing. I cannot even offer myself, although I know I could be useful. I must stay in the eddy here, making bandages that anyone could make, knitting, sewing and praying that some time, some way, my chance may come. I have never regretted the care of your grandmother. You must not think that, Frank. But she is very old, and her thoughts are all in the past. Sometimes I feel that she hardly knows I am around. I am just like her armchair by the window. And I know that if that were taken away there are other chairs. . . . But I mustn't write like this, Frank. You will think I am getting old and hard; old am I, but not hard.

"Your mother will be shut in her room the day you read this. She will be all right after that. It is only the first wrench. But I wish I might be shut in a room, with a son or a husband going to fight in this great war. I am so proud of you. So glad you are going, so hopeful you are coming back.

"Did you ever know that the day you came brought me the great grief of my life? We were in the same house, your mother and I. And in the dawn you came, a great lusty boy-child. I shall never forget your mother's face. And only an hour or so later I learned that the man I was to marry had died of typhoid fever, in Florida. It was the day of the battle of Santiago, but he had never got beyond the detention camp.

"So you see I have given to war, but not to a big war. Only to a little, useless, hysterical war that cost more than it was worth. And now when I would give again, I have nothing to give, not even myself.

"The tobacconist's bill from school came today, and I paid it without showing it to your mother. Also a florist's bill you had forgotten. What a lot of flowers you have been sending to somebody or other!

"Well, Frank, I must run and see that your grandmother's luncheon goes up in good order. I meant to write you about yourself, and being a good boy, and all that, and here I have written only about

myself. But I think you will understand. I had kept it in so long that I just had to talk it out. I feel better now. You are going to get the Hun, dear boy. And you are going to come back covered with medals, as a pin cushion is stuck with pins. Your loving Aunt Fanny.

"P.S. Let me know if the socks are large enough. And can I send you a cake now and then?"

The boy put down the letter. There was a reflective gleam in his eyes. It was rotten luck for Aunt Fan. She ought to have been married, and had a lot of kids. Think of that poor devil dying of typhoid fever in the Spanish War! No danger of that for him. He had been jabbed with all sorts of things.

A private was passing along the deck in front of him, and he hailed him.

"Say, Wat," he inquired, anxiously, "how about getting cakes and things over? Any trouble about it?"

Over his mother's letter he rather hesitated. She had been very brave, he knew, but if his going could break up Aunt Fan into telling about herself, it could do mighty queer things. He was all she had, these days, and she had just about had a fit when he first went away to school.

But he need not have worried.

"Dearest boy of my heart," wrote his mother. "This is not a good-by letter at all. It is a sort of 'welcome' letter—a welcome to new and big things. All these years I have been waiting for you to be a man. And now at last you are a man, with a man's work before you. I am not happy, I cannot write you that. But I am proud. You will never know how proud I am.

"I wear my little service pin like a medal. I want everyone to see it, to know that I have a son who is a soldier for his country. I have hung the service flag high, and I should like so big and blue a star in it that people would stop to stare at it!

"I am not giving you, dearest lad, I am only lending you. You are coming back, and when you come you will find your room ready, and the dogs waiting, and your mother in a perfectly new and expensive gown, at the door. And you will come swinging up, as you always did, and shout, 'Hello, everybody! How's everything?'

"How dear and foolish it all sounds—and yet it is what so many of us are living for.

"You won't forget to wear your woollens, dear, will you? And to change your stockings when you get your feet wet. I have knitted you a dozen pairs. You know how easily you take cold. Do you remember the time you had the measles, and I took them from you, and how you sent the nurse in with a

picture you had drawn of yourself, with your face all covered with little dots? I still have it.

"Oh, my dear, my dear, I am writing everything but what I want to say. I do not want to weaken, but sometimes, when I think of the long time ahead—I wonder if you boys, setting out on this great adventure, can ever know what love you are leaving behind? Boys do not want to be told such things, but surely, surely they know. What hopes and fears and prayers! What tremblings! And what faith in them!

"What hurts most, I think, is that if anything does go wrong, we cannot care for you. Always, until now, there was something we could do, even if it was only a mustard plaster, or a bit of iodine for a little cut. But now we can do nothing. What a wonderful poster that is of the Red Cross, the great mother! It has given me such comfort.

"I am turning your allowance over to the Red Cross.

"Dearest, the one thing that keeps me up is my faith in our cause. It is so right, so wonderful. And God is good. He has given us these wonderful years we have had together, and He has made you what your father so hoped—a man. But sometimes I wonder just how close we will seem to you, over there. We are really so near, just over the edge of the sea. But it will seem very far sometimes. What I want

you most to remember is that this war is only an interlude—that behind it, as before it, there is peace and happiness waiting, and home. To so live, lad of my heart, that you can come back, you and all the others, and take up life again where you left it off, that is my prayer for you. Perhaps not where you left off. You will have grown and changed. But to come back, joyous and triumphant, to those of us who wait. All the months, dear, will be one long waiting.

"Perhaps while you are reading this I shall be in church. I get a little comfort—a great deal, really—out of my quiet hour in some empty church. I just go in and say a little prayer, and then I sit for a time quietly. There is a sort of peace—well, it helps, dear. And sometimes I feel as though your father is nearer then than at other times.

"God bless and keep you, darling. Do you remember your grandfather's motto, written in the little Testament that is yours now? 'Keep your heart and your gun clean.' Do that, dearest boy of my heart. And love your country and your cause, as you love

"Your Mother."

The boy blew his nose fiercely, but he was inarticulate. He had only the vocabulary of youth.

"Poor old mother!" he said to himself. He blinked and surveyed the horizon somberly. "Poor old

mother! Scared to death and as plucky as a goat."

For a moment or two he forgot the last letter, awaiting its turn on his knee. All sorts of dear, familiar memories flooded his mind. He thought of his dog, and of his room at home, and of the old cook who had helped to rear him. He remembered his shabby little car, a poor thing but his own. And his father's picture, with always a few fresh flowers below it. And he remembered, too, the day he had decided to enlist.

It had been in church, and for the first time a great silk flag hung beside the altar. When the choir came in, followed by the clergymen, he had almost forgotten to rise. It had suddenly come over him that that was his flag!

"Funny thing!" he reflected. "Grandfather got it in church, too. Old boy never came back, either. Well—cheer!"

He picked up the last letter.

He opened it slowly, as one who defers a long-looked-for moment, to enjoy its anticipation to the full. The little line between his eyes disappeared, and unconsciously he smoothed his wind-ruffled hair. He glanced about, too, to be sure of no interruption.

"Dearest Frank," began the letter. "It is perfectly awful to think of your going away. It fairly makes me sick. This old war has just spoiled everything.

It isn't possible to have a decent party, and as for tennis—well, I am playing with a lot of scrubs. They are either under seventeen or over forty.

"I just say darn the Germans anyhow. I hope they'll get all that's coming to them, and *more*. Give one of them a good jab for me, Frank.

"Well, I suppose you'll be started when you read this. I am just sick about it. And I'll bet you are too, if this wind keeps up. I hope you'll get a chance at a submarine going over. I mean, of course, a nice safe chance, so you can run it down or blow it up, or something. I don't want anything to happen to you. *You know that*, Frank.

"I don't know that I have any news. Bess is engaged to Merrill at last. They were made for each other, but it took them a long time to find it out. And Merrill is going into the Navy. And Bess wants him to get something safe, at home. Well, that's Bess, all over!

"Did you get the eight pairs of socks I sent you? Bess is sending you some also, and Jane and Alice Lee are making some more. I had the most awful time getting mine done. I simply loathe knitting, but I couldn't bear to think of your not having any. And I wanted you to have something *I'd made myself*. You are simply to think of me all the time you are wearing them.

"I had the most awful dream about you last night.

I won't tell you about it, but it was horrible. *Please* be careful of shells, won't you? You know you are so brave that you are reckless, and I don't want you spoiled. You're awfully good-looking, you know.

"I just lie awake at night, Frank, wondering if you'll ever think about me at all when you get over there. I know it's silly, for you know so many nice girls everywhere, and I don't think the French girls are so very attractive, do you? They're so stiff and self-conscious, but they certainly *do* know how to make eyes at a good-looking man. And you are perfectly wonderful in your uniform, Frank. It's the most *becoming* thing.

"I am really awfully sad. I hardly laugh at all any more, and everyone thinks I am an awful grouch. I'm just crummy all the time. And I think I'll go somewhere and be a nurse. There was a procession of nurses the other day, and they were absolutely fetching. All the men took their hats off. I expect you'll fall for some pretty nurse, Frank, and just forget all about us at home. And if you do I'll just *die*.

"I have read this all over, and it sounds pretty gushy. But I am just sick all over. There's nothing left in America. I'm going to France if I have to swim. And perhaps if you haven't forgotten all about me, we'll meet over there. I won't forget *you*.

Frank. I just never will. And I think you're the bravest thing I ever knew.

"Well, get me a German prisoner for a keepsake, and bring home a whole row of medals. But you'll do that. You're that kind. And, Frank, I shall be thinking of you every minute. I'm going tonight to the funniest play I can find. I've just got to forget things for a little.

"L————"

The boy read the letter gravely and slowly. He found nothing lacking in it.

"Poor little girl!" he said to himself. "Poor *little* girl! As if a fellow would look at a French girl when he can think of her!"

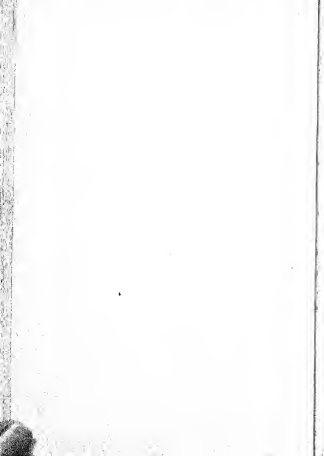
Then he read the letter again.

Sometime later he went below. In the little cabin his roommate was pinning a photograph on the wall, and standing off, cigarette in hand, to admire it.

"Some girl!" said the boy, taking a squint at it.

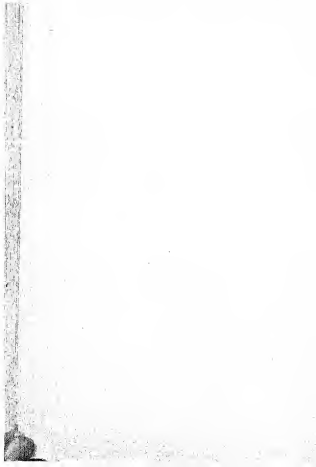
Then he opened his bedroll and very carefully put away the letters from his grandmother, Aunt Fanny and his mother. But the last letter he buttoned into the pocket of his blouse—over his heart.

And went to mess.



OF ADOLESCENCE

The String Bean



THE STRING BEAN

His mother and Uncle Henry had always differed considerably about the String Bean's imagination. Not, of course, that they called him the String Bean. He was generally known as Bill at home.

Uncle Henry maintained that an imagination like that ought to be an asset, and after his nose had healed, and he was able to get some perspective on that strange scene in the woodlands of New Jersey, he felt somewhat the vicarious triumph of those people who foster grand opera singers.

He was damaged, but vindicated.

On the other hand, the String Bean's mother regarded his imagination as a liability. And after Coné stated that when the imagination and the will were in conflict, the imagination always won, she knew he was right. In any conflict between the two, it was her will that lost out against Bill's imagination.

Take, for instance, the time he saved up his pocket money and bought a second-hand soda-water fountain, on the plea that it would save the family the money it spent at the corner drug store.

Or that time when he manufactured a submarine



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bathtub to be exploded by electricity from a safe distance, and the day he tested it in the garage. She had been peacefully cutting roses in the garden, when a portion of the butler's bathtub came out through a window and fell in the dahlia bed, and apparently she had stood there for some time, waiting for portions of the butler to follow. But they did not.

"I don't know," she had said to Uncle Henry that day when he came back from seeing the plumber. "He does such queer things."

"Well, thank God he *does* them," Uncle Henry had observed. "When I see that crowd of mincing little apes at the dancing class—"

But Bill's mother had closed her eyes. Only too recently, at the annual dancing class party, she had sat in the row of anxious mothers, watching for Bill to appear in the doorway and make his bow to Miss Sophia. That Bill who had left home in the conventional attire of a young gentleman of fourteen, who has been inspected at the last moment to be sure his ears were clean and the seams of his black hose straight up the back. And had seen him enter, to the stunned surprise of the class, in her best pink silk stockings with a flowing pink tie to match.

Uncle Henry had choked violently, and had retired by one of the club house French windows, but

Miss Sophia had sent Bill home. Which was, it appeared, precisely what he had desired. He was still "Bill" in those days.

It was while he was away at prep school that he acquired the name of the String Bean. His mother never knew the reason, but Uncle Henry did.

Uncle Henry, in Bill's senior year, received a letter from a gentleman known to some four hundred boys as "Pansy," and immediately invented a letter from his New York brokers. When he got to the school he rather liked Pansy, who had a sense of humor, too. Bill's mother hadn't very much. They hit it off rather well.

"I wouldn't so much mind the one instance," Pansy said. "It was a bet of some sort. But boys are slavish imitators, and Bill is popular." He picked up his glass of ginger ale, to which Uncle Henry had added a dash of flavor from his hip pocket, and stared at it. "By the way," he said, "they're calling him the String Bean now." He grinned. "I must say, when the lights of any car fell on him, he looked like one. Long and thin, you know, and yellow."

"What are you going to do?" inquired Uncle Henry.

"Skin him alive when he gets over his cold," said Pansy cheerfully. "And make it too damned uncomfortable to be fashionable for the rest."

Bill, it appeared, had accepted a wager to run a mile at night along a public highway, *in parvis naturalibus*. A phrase, by the way, which he had to write five hundred times the following day.

Uncle Henry made a private visit that day to the now String Bean's quarters in an outside cottage before proceeding to the infirmary. He found the floor almost entirely covered with portions of that tidy outfit which had accompanied Bill away from home and including various garments with other and strange names. Thus it appeared that he had been sleeping in garments marked "Harcourt III," walking in socks marked "James L. Brown," and wearing a coat from a maker in San Francisco, which was *not* his home town.

Uncle Henry leaped over various objects, and sat down on the bed to look about him, when, with a startling unanimity, all the windows closed and the steam radiator began to hiss. Investigation revealed that Uncle Henry had inadvertently pulled a string attached to the bed by which it was our young hero's custom, on hearing the rising gong, to turn on the heat and lower his windows without rising.

When Uncle Henry and Pansy were walking to the infirmary later on, he explained the String Bean in one word.

"Imagination," he said. "The boy's got imagination."

"Too damned much imagination," said Pansy.

They found the String Bean sitting up in bed, croaking like a raven, and writing "*in parvis naturalibus*" five hundred times.

Imagination brought the String Bean home from college at the end of eighteen months, said imagination having to do with placing a stuffed gorilla from the museum in the pulpit of the chapel, and the faculty lacking Pansy's sense of humor.

He seemed quite unrepentant. In two minutes he had kissed his mother and Maggie the cook, thumped the butler on the back—the one who had *not* been in the bathtub—placed a chaste salute on the outraged top of Uncle Henry's bald head, rolled on the floor of the hall with the dog, and demanded food. And as soon as he was fed he dug a waistcoat marked "J. Charteris" out of his trunk and went off to see Mary Dunn, taking Uncle Henry's new Pierce-Arrow.

Mary was being very popular. There was a Ford, a Buick and a Stutz Bearcat at the curb, a sure indication of popularity. The String Bean knew each one instantly, including the year of its birth, and swung in with the Pierce-Arrow like a grizzly bear among the small fry of the forest. When he drove Uncle Henry's car he had no difficulty at all in imagining it was his own, so he followed his

usual tactics, turning in the drive at reckless speed and then jamming on the brakes, which squealed loudly. This had the usual double effect of forcing Uncle Henry to reline his brakes frequently and of bringing Mary Dunn to the window.

"Why, Bill!" she cried. "When did you get back?"

"About an hour ago," said Bill, and made a magnificent entry into the house.

Instantly the other young gentlemen present suffered a considerable shrinkage. The Ford almost disappeared. The Buick parked itself in a corner. The Stutz Bearcat put up a front for a while, but on a mere remark from the String Bean it remembered a tennis game and went away.

"So the old Stutz is still running!" was what the String Bean said.

Before long only Uncle Henry's Pierce-Arrow remained in front of the Dunn house, and Mary Dunn was gazing up at the String Bean with her soul in her eyes.

"Are you going to stay here now, Bill?"

"I haven't decided. It's so darned narrow. Same people doing the same old things! That same bunch parked here—"

"I suppose it is narrow," said Mary Dunn diplomatically. "Especially for *you*."

"I guess I'm—different." A gentle melancholy

settled on his face. "I feel cramped here. But there's no use saying that at home. They wouldn't understand."

"No," said Mary Dunn. And after a moment, "Can't you broaden them? Or something?"

"What's the use?"

"Use of what?"

"Oh, of everything." He drew a long breath. "When you believe in nothing."

"Bill!"

He smiled bitterly.

"Don't worry about me," he said. "I'm all right. A few illusions more or less—what do they matter?"

"You don't mean—"

"I don't mean anything," he said hollowly—and truthfully. He forced a smile. "Now—tell me all about yourself? I see that bunch of snuggle-puppies still hangs around, splitting one idea among them."

"They *are* stupid," Mary Dunn said, disloyally abandoning three old loves for one new. "What are you going to do, Bill? Go into your uncle's bank?"

"There you go!" he said scornfully. "Banks. Money. That's all anybody here thinks about."

"What *are* you going to do?"

"Think, dream, aspire." He wandered over to the bookcase and glanced at its contents. "Piffle!" he said, with a large gesture. "Bunk! One drop of

truth in a sea of words. Ye gods, can we never face reality?"

"Your mother said—"

"Mary," he turned to her. "Have you read Dunsany? Or Cabell? Or Oscar Wilde?"

"I've been awfully busy, Bill."

"Or *The Book of the Dead*?"

"Who wrote it, Bill?"

He gave her a gentle glance, full of pity, and picked up his hat.

"Sorry," he muttered. "I keep forgetting—"

He went away, wistful and lonely. Ye gods, was a man to live spiritually alone? Always alone?

The local library was requested the next day for a copy of *The Book of the Dead*. But it was not listed under any of the better known authors.

During most of that spring Mr. William Whitmore, known to the initiate as the String Bean, otherwise as Bill, lived a dual existence. To his family and to Mary Dunn he was much the same as usual. He played tennis, took a shower, leaving the bathroom in a state of inundation and chaos, and was liable afterwards, clad only in a bath towel, to make sudden and surreptitious forays on the refrigerator downstairs. In other words, he lived the normal life of a young man unexpectedly freed from study and not yet quite ready to go to work. He even sometimes joined the ranks of the snuggle-

puppies, using Uncle Henry's ear when obtainable.

"Where are you going?" his mother asked on one such occasion.

"Oh, necking," he stated, with a grin. She believed that he referred to Uncle Henry's frequent statement that he would break his neck in the car!

But he was living the life of his imagination also. Frequently, after dinner, he shut himself in his room and might have been seen by any passer-by, head bent on hand under the lamp of his desk, engaged in some mysterious mental labor.

To Mary Dunn, who made it a point to be a frequent passer-by, he confided that he was writing.

"When I see what they publish," he said, "it makes me sick. If I couldn't do better than that—"

"But of course you can, Bill."

"Ideas," he said. "Ideas. *Ideas*. They seem to have none. Ye gods! Take a man and a girl, put them together, take them apart and put them together again—and they call that life!"

"Well, it *is* life, isn't it?"

"Oh, it's necessary, if you want the world to go on. But do we want it to go on? Why? And whither?"

Mary hadn't the slightest idea of why or whither, so she kept very quiet. She was a pretty girl, and quite unconsciously determined that the world should go on.

One morning Bill's mother brought a piece of paper to the breakfast table. Uncle Henry was already there, all pink and shaved for his bank. He was supposed to be reading the financial page, but he was actually reading the comics.

Bill's mother laid the piece of paper before him.

"He's writing, Henry."

"Well, he'd better have some outlet for that imagination of his. What's he writing?"

"Poetry."

"My Gosh!" said Uncle Henry. And read the scrap aloud.

*"This is the sea, which the poets describe
Boundless and deep, and full of the love
And hate of a woman."*

Uncle Henry stared at it in stupefaction. Then he got out his glasses and read it again.

"It sounds very pretty," said Bill's mother.

"Sounds! Sounds!" snorted Uncle Henry. "What the devil does it mean?" He propped it up in front of him, and studied it, his lips moving. "Full of the love and hate of a woman! Full of fish!"

That night Uncle Henry ate his dinner in a pregnant silence. When the String Bean had finished his third serving of maple mousse, and had taken the dog out to pick a fight if possible with the

Airedale next door, Uncle Henry stood at a window and looked after him.

"I suppose," he observed, "every boy at that age is a mixture of normality and the common jackass. But I'm eternally dog-goned if we're going to have a poet in this family."

When the String Bean returned with the dog, there was in evidence a curious change in his manner. He was grave and abstracted, and he made a rather magnificent gesture toward the sunset, and murmured dreamily:

*"Just as the highest mountain
Is abandoned to night at last,
My sun of ambition is setting;
Has left me to judge the past."*

Uncle Henry's eyes narrowed.

Late that evening Bill's mother heard the door of his sanctum open, and Uncle Henry about to emerge.

"They say you'll be a liability for the first six months," he was saying. "But if the sun of your ambition feels like setting, it had better not hatch out any sonnets around here."

There was no reply.

Mary Dunn was greatly excited about Bill's going on a newspaper, and after the day when he showed

her his police card it was noticeable that the Buick, the Ford and the Stutz Bearcat began to be parked in front of the Johnson house, down the street.

Mary would pick out the leading editorial and recognize the String Bean's handiwork in it. One entitled: "Are We Worthy of Our Birthright?" she was so certain about that he had not the heart to deceive her.

But the truth was that the String Bean's contributions to the opinion-forming press of the world were running about like this:

"Rev. Dr. Aloysius B. Conner has returned from his vacation spent at Atlantic City, and will preach at St. Margaret's tomorrow at the eleven o'clock service."

He was receiving fifteen dollars a week.

Two things happened at about this time which had a vital effect on the String Bean's future career.

One was the fact that Uncle Henry, returning from luncheon at his club one day, was stupefied to see, racing to a fire, the Pierce-Arrow which was supposed to be safely at home. Two policemen were hanging on the running board, and nine young gentlemen, obviously of the newspaper fraternity, were jammed inside it, some even sitting on the tops of its splendidly varnished doors. As Uncle Henry watched, the car struck a wet place in the

street, turned completely around, and then went on again, without so much as a hesitation.

Uncle Henry swallowed his heart, which had been in his throat, and his indignation, which was extreme, and went back to his bank. His sense of outrage was not mitigated by the fact that all Bill's paper gave to the fire was three lines about burning waste in a cellar.

He did a little figuring that afternoon. Gasoline, oil, wear and tear on tires, brakes and cushions, against the fifteen dollars a week Bill was receiving, and which, by the way, only Bill ever saw. And being a gentleman to whom the number seven was the magic number, representing the banker's dream of interest, he divided the fifteen by seven, and computed that his own net loss that day was something like eight dollars.

The other event was a conversation between the String Bean and his city editor, anent the intrusion of a quotation from De Quincey into the account of the arrest of a gentleman who had been arrested stealing dope.

"I don't give a damn who De Quincey was, or what he took," the city editor had said in a loud tone. "What we deal in here is fact. Cold, hard fact. What we want is What, When, Where, and if possibly, Why. We don't want imagination."

"It takes imagination to get news."

"We aim to supply that here," said the city editor dryly. "What we want from you is fact. And darned little of that."

It is rather interesting to sit back for a moment here, and reflect on these two apparently small and irrelevant incidents. And a third. For it was on this day that an elderly veteran named Thomas Baird drew one hundred and forty dollars from Uncle Henry's bank preparatory to a little trip, and decided to have his shoes half-soled and heeled.

Every crisis is led up to by a series of apparently unrelated events. Here was Uncle Henry, figuring his net loss on the String Bean per day. Here was the String Bean, told to deal only with facts. And here was poor old Thomas Baird, who had never heard of either of them, but about to contribute all he had toward a *dénouement* which involved them all.

First of all comes the acquisition by the String Bean of a Ford car.

"Just how long," inquired Uncle Henry that night, "have you been gathering the news in my car?"

The String Bean flushed slightly.

"Just now and then."

"You might observe to your editors," Uncle Henry said, "that they are not hiring me. Or my car."

"If you want the exact truth," said the String Bean latterly, "it's the car they're hiring, as far as I can see. They're darned careful to let me know I'm not worth a whoop in hades."

The upshot of it was that the next day the String Bean took the two hundred and fifty dollars which was Uncle Henry's annual Christmas gift to him—"Not to spend. To invest"—and bought a second-hand Ford car. As it was this Ford which was parked in the woodland in New Jersey, and which Uncle Henry heard departing as he lay writhing in the dust, it will bear a little description.

Or perhaps it need not be described. Perhaps it is enough to say that when Uncle Henry came home from the bank that night and saw it parked next to the curb, he called to the butler to go out and sweep it away.

However, because it was his own Bill loved it. And because it was disreputable, it served its strange later purpose extremely well.

"How does it run?" Uncle Henry inquired that night.

"Run!" said the String Bean. "It can run circles around that hearse of yours!" And because he was very happy, he chanted as he got his hat to go to the Dunn house:

*"Did you ever think, as the hearse rolls by,
That sooner or la-ter you and I
Will roll along in that self-same hack
With never a thou-ought of coming back."*

If Mary Dunn had any mental reservations when called to inspect the new treasure, she reserved them. If she recalled the old days of the Buick, the Stutz and Uncle Henry's Pierce-Arrow, she did not mention them.

"Of course you ought to have a car of your own, Bill. Working the way you do."

"Yeah," said Bill, noncommittally.

"I recognized several of your articles today. I can *always* tell your style. It's so distinctive."

"You watch me," said Bill darkly. "Before I'm through I'm going to show that paper something it didn't know existed."

"What, Bill?"

"Imagination, my child. Imagination," said Bill.

Something new had entered into the String Bean's soul with the acquisition of that Ford. There is an influence exerted on all of us by our surroundings. Thus, while Uncle Henry's car had had a certain majesty, a sort of solid six percent and good collateral appearance, the Ford was undeniably irresponsible, disreputable and reckless.

And the String Bean's imagination made him a

victim of it. There was, too, the beginning of a sense of property, and with it that independence of *soul* which is all property can bring. Certain it is that the String Bean began about this time to wear his hat at a slightly rakish angle.

And the dress suit he had brought home from college certainly not being the one he had taken away, he was totally uninterested in getting a new one.

"Whose is it, anyhow, Bill?" his mother demanded. "It's ever so much too small for you."

"No idea," he said cheerfully. "Suppose some fellow didn't return mine, so I borrowed it. It's all right."

He was, as a matter of fact, getting down to a fifteen dollar a week basis. And in spite of tradition, it is not the fifteen dollar a week men who write poetry. He spent less time over the desk, and rather more with Mary Dunn with whom he criticized severely the other newspapers of the city, and uttered praise—with reservations—of his own.

"Look at it!" he would say, holding up a rival sheet. "Look at the make-up of that front page! Rotten! And the editorials! No guts, Mary, my child. Positively no guts."

Mary was a little shocked, but she thrilled, too, at the courage which uses strong words for what was clearly a deplorable state of affairs.

"You are perfectly right, Bill," she said slavishly. "It really hasn't any g-guts, has it?"

And then, one summer night, old Mr. Baird was seen by two persons to enter the shoemaker's shop to get his shoes, which had been half-soled and heeled, and was never seen alive again. He was found the next morning, poor gentleman, in an alleyway a block or so away, with his head bashed in and his one hundred and forty dollars gone.

The String Bean, via the Ford, was there almost as soon as the police, and went a little sick. But he got the What, Where, When and Why of it, and going back to his desk, wrote his heart into the story. He told about the approaching vacation, and the sword from the time Mr. Baird was in the Civil War, with the end of the scabbard worn from dragging on the ground, and which was the sole ornament of the veteran's shabby little room. He wrote with a sob in his throat and a hand that shook a little.

But there was an Elks Convention in the city, and when he looked for his story this is what he found:

"The body of an aged veteran, Thomas Baird, was discovered at eight o'clock last night in Peters Alley, eighth ward. His head had been crushed by a blunt instrument. Robbery was the motive assigned by the police."

The next day the String Bean resigned.

"What's the trouble?" asked the city editor.

The String Bean pulled out a copy of his story on the Baird murder, and beside it laid the half inch or so of published story. The editor read them both, the long story last. Then he handed it back, with a speech the insulting quality of which only a newspaper man can realize.

"Tine!" he said. "Why don't you send it to a magazine?"

The String Bean gave him a long, long look. Then he picked up his hat and put it on his head.

"That's plenty," he said, and started out.

The editor watched him. He had a sneaking liking for the boy, and certainly that Pierce-Arrow had been useful.

"Drop in and see us now and then," he called. "Let us know how you're getting along."

"When I come back," the String Bean stated, "it will be because you send for me."

He went out, and having been reared on the story of the little boy who was raised in a barn, and so never closed the door behind him, he closed the door very politely. It was a hot day. The editor swore, and getting up, opened it again.

The String Bean went over that brief conversation on his way home in the Ford, into which he fitted

rather like a boot tree in a boot. He was wrapped in a manner of impenetrable dignity. Going around a curve the Ford threw a front wheel, and the String Bean struck the steering wheel amishships. But although he was obliged to get out and hold on to a lamp post for some moments, his dignity somehow remained.

It was about all he had left.

Mary Dunn heard all about it that night, and asked to see the story. She read it carefully, not to lose one precious word, and then looked up, her brown eyes soft with admiration.

"Well, Bill," she said, "why *don't* you send it to a magazine?"

He went home soon after that, permanently embittered.

Just what effect the String Bean's final words to the editor had had on himself it is rather hard to say. Nothing, on the surface, seemed less likely than that he would ever be sent for. But after a day or two, much pondering over them began to have the usual effect on his subconscious mind. From a purely rhetorical effort, induced by anger, the idea grew in his mind, fed by his imagination. Visions of himself, stalking on request into the editorial office, and looking man to man at the creature of What, Where, When and Why, accompanied him to bed, and rose with him in the morning.

"Come back?" he would say, lifting his eyebrows. "Why? You didn't think much of me while I was here."

"Well, live and learn," the city editor would say.

"I've just had an offer from the *New York Times*. But I'll think it over."

He would then depart, closing the door politely, and leave the city editor to long, sad thoughts.

But his wound was really a deep one. He had had all the usual boy's pride in his first job; in his arrival at independence and man's estate. All the usual boy's fear of failure, covered by a strutting complacency of manner. He had sickish moments when he saw himself going through life, doing things nobody wanted, and learning that an imagination may be a curse instead of a blessing.

He told Uncle Henry one night that if nothing better turned up soon, he would go into the bank.

"That's very good of you," said Uncle Henry, dryly. "I appreciate it."

He began to develop a touch of realism in his poetry at that time. One scrap which his mother burned was evidently addressed to the dog, and began:

"Dear son, we sit in our easy chair,

Warm, with our bellies filled . . ."

This was quite literally true.

"He's really very unhappy," his mother said to Uncle Henry. "But he eats well enough."

"Eats!" Uncle Henry snorted. "I've been looking at him sideways for a week. Where the devil does he put it?"

Then, suddenly, the String Bean began to be liable to mysterious absences. And at the same time Uncle Henry missed his pet set of Gaboriau from the library. Also the *Murders in the Rue Morgue*. He found them in the String Bean's room, and hoped he was abandoning poetry for the detective novel, which was at least a lucrative and respectable way of earning a living. This hope was strengthened by the finding of a rough diagram on the String Bean's desk, showing what appeared to be an alley, a spot on it marked by a cross, and a small building with a rear exit on said alley. Every detective story had a diagram.

"I wish I knew where Bill goes," said his mother one day. "It isn't the Dunn girl. I know that."

"Well, the more he keeps that debauched rat trap away from the curb, the better I'll be pleased. He doesn't even wash it."

"He says it hurts the varnish."

"Varnish!" said Uncle Henry. "What varnish? It looks like somebody's tin roof, after a cyclone."

And then, without warning, the String Bean disappeared. Ford and all. One moment he was, and the next he was not.

Mary Anne, going in to pull up the shades, found his bed had not been slept in, and reported it to Uncle Henry. Uncle Henry merely nodded and re-read a note in his hand.

"Nothing has happened to me," he read, "and tell Mother for goodness' sake not to worry. I'm simply following up an idea. If I get stuck I'll call on you, and I'm banking on you like everything. Bill."

Added at the bottom, in pencil and evidently later, "I overdrew my account today a hundred dollars. Fix it up, won't you? You can have the Ford for it, when I come back."

Uncle Henry snorted.

Investigation later revealed that the String Bean had taken with him:

Item: One hundred dollars from Uncle Henry's bank.

" The Ford car.

" No clothes at all.

He had apparently departed once more *in puris naturalibus*. It was only this last fact which kept his mother from going to the police at once.

Three weeks went by. Old Mr. Baird had been in

his grave in the veterans' part of the cemetery for a month. The police had settled in their own minds who had killed him, and then had gone about their other business of chasing bootleggers and red-tagging parked automobiles. Because the police know a great many things which are not of the slightest use to them.

Thus, they knew old Mr. Baird had gone to the cobbler's to get his shoes, and that an assistant there named Carl Schmidt had given them to him. They knew he had paid for them out of the roll of bills he had drawn from the bank, and that Carl had seen this money. They knew, as well as they knew anything that, as it was closing time, the aforesaid Carl had then got his hat and followed Mr. Baird out a rear door, and had in a near-by alley killed him with a paving block. They *had* the paving block.

But they had not, and probably never would have, the slightest proof that Carl Schmidt had done the deed. The third degree and various interesting variations of it having failed, Carl Schmidt was released, and in a state of indignation vowed to revenge himself on the city of his adoption by leaving it. Which he did.

He had been gone three weeks, and it was ten days after the String Bean had disappeared, when

Uncle Henry received a letter at the bank. He read it through once, muttered something, and then read it again. After a time he rang a bell, and his secretary came in.

"Take this," he said. "To Mr. Frank McBride, Western Union, New York City. Reach New York tomorrow one P. M. Waldorf. Have you lost your mind?"

When Uncle Henry left the bank that afternoon, he carried with him a look of furtiveness and one of those valises which banks send out to borrow money and so on before the bank examiner comes around.

"What ho!" said the paying teller to the assistant cashier, as the doors closed behind their president. "Has the old man's bootlegger been in today?"

The assistant cashier looked glumly toward the doors. There was an error of three cents somewhere, and he had wanted to play golf.

"May be breaking for Canada," he said sourly. "I wish I had the sense to do it."

It was pure coincidence, of course, but the assistant cashier saw Uncle Henry go into the railroad station that night, and he still had the bag in his hand.

At two o'clock the next afternoon there was a knock at Uncle Henry's door in the Waldorf, and Uncle Henry opened it. Outside stood a discrepu-

table individual who said, "Sign, sir," in a business-like voice, and held out a package.

"Sign?" said Uncle Henry, who as a banker was frightfully particular about what he signed. "For what?"

"There's nothing in it," explained the disreputable individual. "But sign anyhow. It's the only way they'd let me up. Better give me a quarter, too. Can't be too careful."

Uncle Henry grunted, but he obediently signed and handed over a quarter, and Mr. Frank McBride, alias the String Bean, grinned and entered the room. He was not, as his mother had dreaded, *in paris naturalibus*, but in what had once been the extreme of fashion on Eighth Avenue, New York City; short coat, mack cut in at the waist and belted, tight trousers well drawn up and a soft cap. All in a state of extreme disrepair. He grinned at Uncle Henry's face, and made with the instinct of a homing pigeon for Uncle Henry's box of cigars.

"Have one, sir?" he asked.

"What the devil's all this masquerade?" Uncle Henry demanded, looking at the String Bean's tie, which was horrible.

"Did you bring the bag?"

"I did," said Uncle Henry with grimness. "And I met my own cashier as I was getting on the train.

God only knows what's going on at the bank today."

"And a revolver?"

"No," said Uncle Henry firmly.

"I thought! Well, I can get a second hand for eight dollars. Better give me the eight. I'm strapped."

"Not until I know what it's about. And I'll have whatever I signed there, too. I came up here to take you home, and no hocus pocus."

"Plenty of hocus pocus. It's all that."

"*What's* all that?"

Uncle Henry's voice was raised in exasperation. That was the last time it was raised for some time, for Uncle Henry, as he listened, became literally speechless.

At the end of three minutes or so the String Bean stopped talking, and Uncle Henry moistened his lips.

"That's all," said the String Bean.

"All? Why, you infernal young idiot—I"

"It won't take five minutes. And you needn't speak a word."

"I'm speaking right now."

"Just fall, you know. *Toward* the gun. They always fall toward the gun, you know."

Uncle Henry went a trifle pale.

"I certainly counted on you, sir," the String Bean went on. "It's the chance of a lifetime. I've worked

hard to get this far, too. He was suspicious, and he's got no imagination."

"Imagination!" wailed Uncle Henry. "Suppose it gets in the papers?"

"I'm doing it to get it in the papers. One paper first."

Uncle Henry went to his closet where he had put his flask in a shoe, away from the chambermaid. After a moment his color came back.

"I can't pull it off without you, sir," said the String Bean, fondling with a button of his dreadful coat. "And a blank cartridge is harmless."

"How do you know it'll be a blank?" said Uncle Henry. "There might be a mistake somewhere."

"I'll take care of that." He surveyed Uncle Henry carefully. "I certainly am glad I thought of you," he reflected. "You look like a million dollars' worth of respectability. I couldn't use a bull. They all look alike."

Whether Uncle Henry knew that a bull was a detective, or whether he believed the reference to be to a cow of the male persuasion, is not pertinent here. What is pertinent is that one-half hour later the String Bean rose from the bed and wrung Uncle Henry's hand.

"I knew you'd do it," he said. "You've got imagination."

Uncle Henry nursed his fingers and muttered something.

The following day the city editor of the String Bean's whilom newspaper received a bulky manuscript in a sealed envelope, enclosed in another and accompanied by a letter.

"Dear Mr. Wheeler: Immediately on receipt of wire or long distance message from me read enclosed story. Advise getting out extra. You will be on the street six hours before the rest.

Yours very truly,

WILLIAM WHITMORE.

P. S.: What price imagination?"

At nine o'clock on the morning of the following day two youths left a certain unsavory lodging house in lower New York in an ancient Ford, and took their way by the ferry to New Jersey.

One of them was a heavy-faced individual, lowering and suspicious, wearing a discolored sweater and a look of extreme nervousness. The other, easy, natty, and wedged tight beneath the steering wheel, was the String Bean. So calm were the hands with which he lighted his cigarette that the other youth eyed him.

"Nothing wrong with *your* nerves, McBride," he said, grudgingly admiring.

"You're new to it, Carl. That's all," said the String Bean, with an air of gentle patronage.

Carl's lips opened. Then he closed them again.

At half past ten the String Bean hid the Ford in a woods a mile or so from the railway station of a small industrial town in New Jersey, looked at his watch, and lighted another cigarette.

"Almost time," he observed. "He always takes this cut-off to the factory. Bag's heavy, and it's shorter."

Carl looked around. The place was deserted and wild; his admiration for his companion went up as his courage went down. It is one thing to hit an elderly veteran from the rear with a paving block at night, and quite another to face an armed paymaster in full daylight.

"Some of these fellows are mighty quick with a gun," he said.

A vision of Uncle Henry reaching back to his flask pocket flashed through the String Bean's mind.

"Look here," he said. "I don't want any quitters around me. I'm not asking you to do anything, am I? You stay back. This is *my* job."

He then tied a handkerchief over the lower part of his face, and examined a revolver for which he had paid eight dollars of Uncle Henry's perfectly good money, and with which he now proposed to murder Uncle Henry . . .

At ten-forty-five a middle-aged gentleman, very pale, and clutching a paymaster's bag in his hand, got out of a train at the railway station, and tottered to a seat inside the building. He sat for some time, ever and anon lifting his hat to wipe the top of a bald and perspiring head. The ticket agent, looking out through the window, observed that now and then he muttered to himself.

Finally he got feebly to his feet, and struck out along a path which led through a field toward a bit of woodland. Had he been interested in his surroundings he would have seen the chimneys of a large industrial plant beyond the trees. But he was not interested.

Through his mind went various pictures, as in the case of a man drowning. He saw the butler's bathtub coming through a window, and a small boy in pink silk stockings in a doorway, and later on a thin long figure *in paris naturalibus*, with the lights of an automobile turned on it. But he staggered on.

By the time he reached the woodland he was in a state of furious indignation. He had made up his mind to stop this nonsense then and there. So when a masked figure stepped out into the pathway ahead of him, revolver leveled, and called sharply, "Hands up!" Uncle Henry had totally forgotten the part he was to play.

"Stop this damned nonsense!" he roared. "If you think for a minute—"

Suddenly the String Bean fired, and Uncle Henry fell, face downward on the ground, writhing convulsively. It is doubtful if he even knew, for some minutes, that he was alone, or heard the distant clugging of a Ford car receding into the distance. When at last he sat up and looked about him, the bag was gone, and the woodland empty.

The String Bean paused outside Uncle Henry's door at the Waldorf that night. There was a strong odor of iodoform coming from near by, and the String Bean stopped and sniffed.

"Great Scott!" he muttered. "What if the dear old boy—"

He clutched a bag which he held in his hand, and cautiously opened the door. Uncle Henry was in bed, and the iodoform odor was heavy about him. The source of it was explained by a piece of gauze on the bridge of Uncle Henry's nose, held there by radiating adhesive strips. Uncle Henry himself was holding his nostrils with one hand and a book with the other.

"Say, for the love of heaven!" said the String Bean.

"Go on out of here!" roared Uncle Henry. "Leave that damned bag and clear!"

"Did you fall on your nose?"

"Fall on my nose. *You shot me!*"

"What!"

"One inch either way and I'd have lost an eye!" howled Uncle Henry.

"It was a blank, sir."

"It had a wad in it, didn't it?" shrieked Uncle Henry. "That hotel doctor thinks I tried to kill myself. If that gets out—I"

"I'm sorry, sir," breathed the String Bean. "A wad! Oh, ye gods!"

Suddenly he began to laugh. Maybe there was an element of hysteria in it, for he had had a long and trying day. It was as much as he could do to dodge the book Uncle Henry threw at him viciously. He rocked as he held onto the foot of the bed.

"And me thinking it was acting!" he gasped. "If you'd seen yourself, rolling on the ground—"

He sat down on the floor, and rocked gently back and forth, holding a filthy handkerchief to his eyes.

After a time he recovered somewhat, and took a telegram out of his pocket.

Uncle Henry read it, over the bridge of his plastered nose.

"Then it worked out all right."

"Yea. Thanks to the best old scout the world has ever seen. Let me kiss you, won't you?" He grinned

at his uncle, who told him where to go with great promptness.

"When we got back and opened the bag, and it had only the Gideon Bible in it from the hotel, he nearly had a fit. Then I pulled the stuff on him; said we'd better separate. He knew too much about me, and anyhow he wasn't in my class. He'd been scared straight through. That made him mad, and he said he'd croaked a guy himself. I pretended not to believe it, so he came over, chapter and book, about Baird."

"And the police were there?"

"Yeah. The one in the clothes closet was practically asphyxiated. But the fellow in the next room got it all."

"And he's under arrest?"

"I'll tell the world he is," said the String Bean cheerfully.

Some time later Uncle Henry yawned, and suddenly remembered something.

"What about the story?"

"Oh," said the String Bean, and yawned also. "I sent that off yesterday."

"Yesterday! Why, yon lunatic, it didn't happen until today."

"But I knew it was going to happen," said the String Bean patiently.

Suddenly he dipped into the pockets of his terri-

ble coat and brought up a telegram which Uncle Henry read.

"Market on imagination decidedly bullish. Went up one hundred points today. (Signed) Wheeler."

Two days later Uncle Henry returned to his bank, carrying the bag and a strip of adhesive across the bridge of his nose. He met the assistant cashier just outside the door of his office, and the assistant cashier saw them both at once.

"Sorry to see you've met with an accident, sir," said the assistant cashier.

"Ran into a door," said Uncle Henry brazenly. And entered his office.

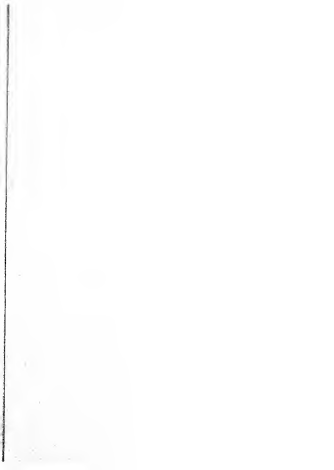
That evening the String Bean sat on the veranda of the Dunn house, and stared at the Buick, the Ford and the Stutz Bearcat parked up the street.

"Even if I hadn't seen your name at the top," Mary was saying, "I'd have known it was yours. And the editorial said it was a great piece of detective work."

"Detective work!" said the String Bean scornfully. "It was a matter of pure psychology. Psychology and imagination."

"And you're going back on the paper?"

"I haven't decided yet," said the String Bean languidly. "They want me. They'll double my salary, but—"



"But what, Bill?"

"They don't talk my language. That's all. Did you see that poem they published tonight? Horrible."

"Bill," she said softly, "you've never recited any of your poetry to me. I know you write it. I've *seen* you."

He was touched. He leaned back on the step to look up at her, and then reached up and took her hand.

"Well, listen to this," he said. And in a low, tense voice, the free hand pointing out over the Dunn lawn, he began:

*"This is the soul Which the poets describe
Boundless and deep, and full of the love
And hate of a woman."*

Mary Dunn closed her eyes in ecstacy.